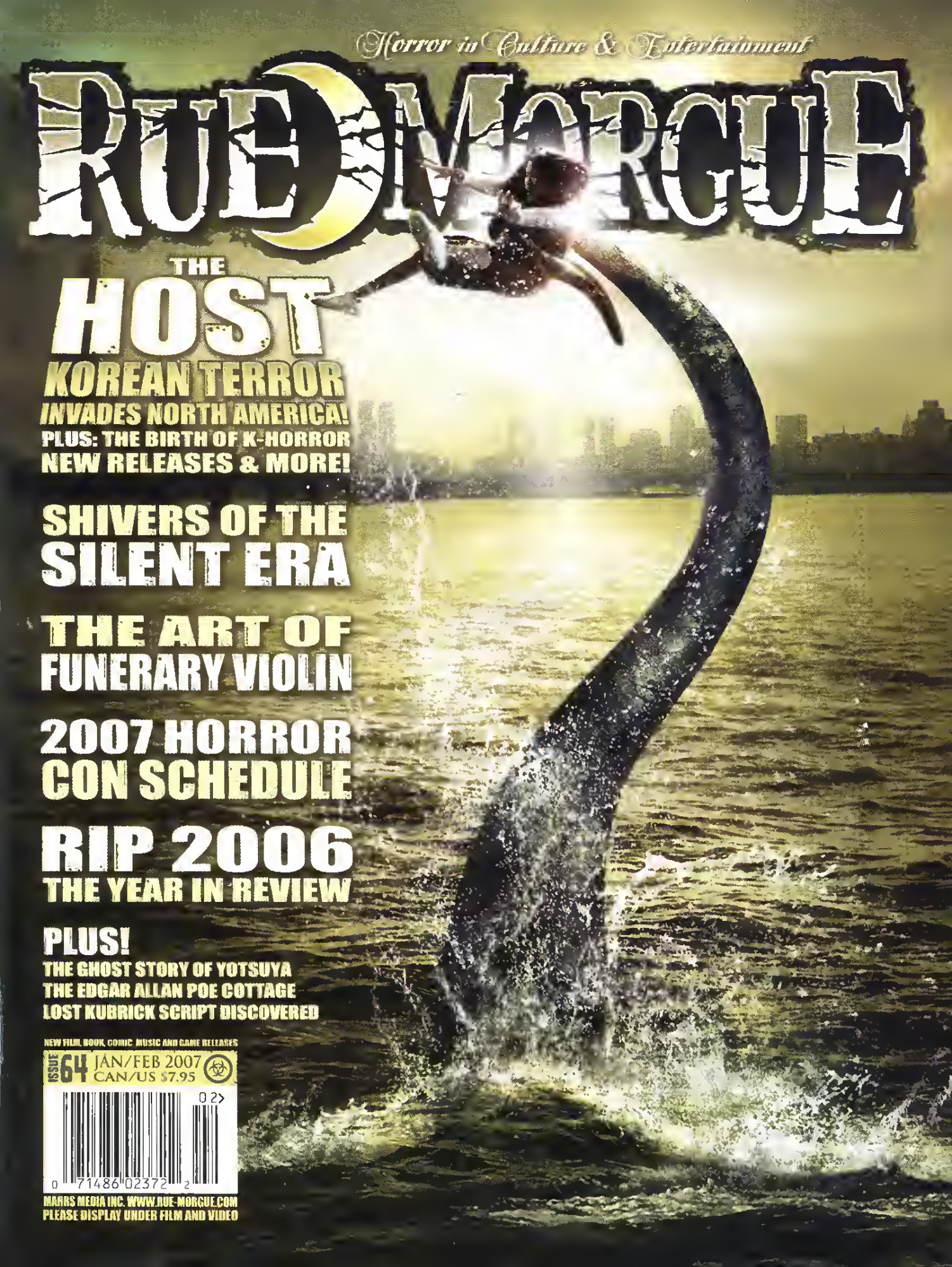

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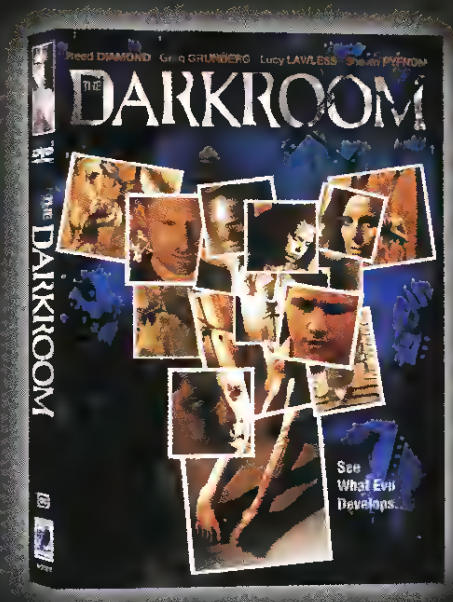
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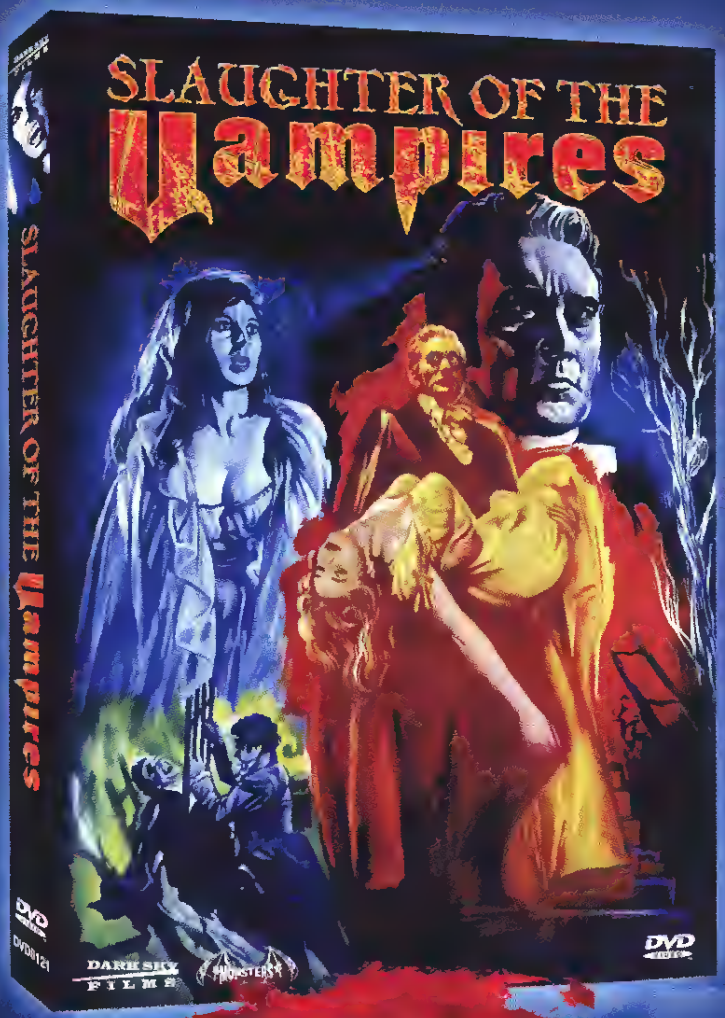
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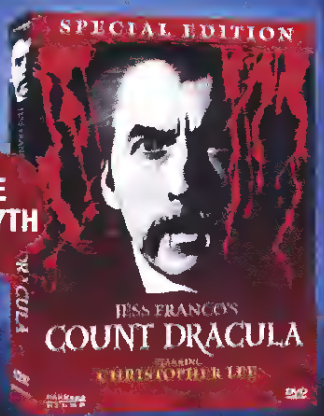
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Note From Underground



Over the years, the monster movie subgenre has cultivated a reputation for being goofy, in part owing to the schlock aesthetic of the 1950s/'60s B-flick boom. Understandable, as many of those films are indeed brainless popcorn fare made for the sole purpose of turning a quick buck. Goofball films such as *Them!* (1954), *Attack of the Crab Monsters* (1957) and *The Angry Red Planet* (1960) are a product of their time: the drive-in era, when the more ridiculous and bombastic the picture, the better the box-office returns.

But, as everyone knows, that wasn't always the case. Monsters have been a principal raw material of cinema since its infancy – as far back as Georges Méliès' *La Caverne maudite* (*The Cave of the Demons*, 1898). Consider the early German Expressionist films *The Golem* (1915), *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1920), *The Weary Death* (1921) or *Nosferatu* (1922) – movies that possess a unique style, tendering intellectual topics through symbolism, mise-en-scene and, of course, monsters (see pg 24 for a look at the silent horror film era). There, the monsters' purpose was acumen, providing keen insight into the picture's layered subtext – which was often repression, the most common motive of the horror film. (Repression of impulses – sexual, political or otherwise – prompts filmmakers to action, consciously or subconsciously, more often than any other affliction).

As long as there's some kind of social anxiety percolating, there will always be monsters representing that anxiety on the silver screen. Steven Spielberg's blockbuster remake of *War of the Worlds* wormed its way into viewers' frightened hearts and pocketbooks in 2005 because this time the Martians were a stand-in for terrorists, which is even more topical in today's Al Qaeda-fearing society than it was during the Cold War, when Byron Haskin's original film was released.

It's curious that these movies continue to captivate us the way they do, being that cinema long since graduated from the monster movie as a method of broaching sensitive topics to a place that's far less symbolic. We're now assaulted point-blank with controversial issues. Movies like *Deliverance*, *I Stand Alone*, *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*, *Requiem for a Dream*, *Baise-moi (Rape Me)*, *Happiness*, even *The Passion of the Christ*, all challenge complacent, polite audiences by boldly going where the monster movie and its veiled obsessions never could. By these standards, the meaningful monster movie appears infantile. Again, that isn't always the case, though.

Loosely based on a true story of an American scientist who forced a Korean subordinate to dump canisters of toxic formaldehyde down a sink drain, Joon-ho Bong's new creature feature *The Host* takes us to Seoul, South Korea, where a gargantuan mutated beast lurks in the Han river, growing larger by feasting on the city's populace until it emerges and causes widespread panic. But the movie – especially for Koreans – is much more than the sum of its abominable fish parts, despite its surface appearance as an action-packed monster movie.

Though the film is at times a near-slapstick bizarro comedy, there is a deliberate socio-political subtext that weaves itself throughout. *The Host* criticizes the South Korea's approach to poverty, the political and economic chaos that followed the establishment of a military government in 1945, the subsequent, continued American occupation, and the balance of power between the government and its citizens. It's also the highest grossing film to ever come out of the country, likely because its residents can intimately identify with what it has to say.

It strikes me as ironic that monster movies still speak to these greater concerns and realities yet they are dismissed by the culture at large as 'just' monster movies. Perhaps this speaks to the nature of a society when it approaches its wounds in a very safe way (i.e. by coating them with candy). Perhaps these silly monster movies perform an important psychological function precisely by being silly, or at least being marketed as such.

Given that Korea's film industry has only recently been freed from the suffocating clutches of government restrictions, it makes sense that *The Host*'s messages would be gently delivered, but what it's really doing is poking fun at its bruises rather than taking them too seriously. I really admire this deceptively clever, lackadaisical approach to their country's traumatic socio-political issues. Maybe we could learn something from them.

JV

jovanka@rue-morgue.com

Horror is Culture & Entertainment

RUE MORGUE MAGAZINE

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Rue Morgue #64 is dedicated to Griffin Matthew Mercer Butler. Welcome to the weird world!

COVER THE HOST
DESIGN BY GARY PULLIN

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Post Mortem

QUESTIONS • COMMENTS • CRITICISM

JUST PICKED UP *RM#62* and was completely blown away by it, specifically the articles on Uwe Boll, the insightful interview and even more specifically by Chris Alexander's hilarious and insightful diary of his fight with the director. Mr. Alexander's "Schizoid Cinephile" column has always been a favourite of mine, but with this incredible boxing match (even though he lost, oh well!) and his account of it, he has truly elevated himself to a cult hero in my eyes. The rest of the mag was amazing too, of course – lots of ghoulish fun from cover to cover. *Rue Morgue* rules and it's creative, passionate writers like Alexander, the Gore-Met, John W. Bowen, Stuart Andrews, Last Chance Lance, etc. that make it such a unique read.

Sam Weintraub – New York City

THE UWE BOLL PIECE was odd and entertaining. At the comic shop where I buy *Rue Morgue*, Boll is hated and reviled. This article just reinforces what people say about him. Personally, I like *House of the Dead*. And I love the ads you horror freaks print. I know I can always find at least five DVDs I want to purchase from the ads alone. I'm a DVDeviant! Not to mention some good writing and honest reviews. I have nothing had to say about this publication, all I want to ask is if you could do some reviews of these films: *Cellar Dweller*, *Parasite*, *Octaman*, *Holy Virgin vs. the Evil Dead*, *Sex Wish*, *Forced Entry*, *La Bimba de Satana*, and horror from countries like the Philippines, Indonesia and Mexico. Again, thanks for putting out a horror mag that gives me more enjoyment than some of these damn movies!

Arty Flores – San Antonio, Texas

THANKS FOR PRINTING my letter in *RM#62*, well, what was left of it anyways. (Mine was the letter about the WWE film, *See No Evil*.) What happened to all my colourful fucking expletives? I thought *Rue Morgue* was against censorship? Fuck Vince McMahon. Fuck the WWE. Fuck *See No Evil*. Fuck anyone who thinks *See No Evil* is a good film. Fuck anyone who thinks Vince McMahon is a genius. There, now I feel better.

Sean Fucking Gamman – Windsor, Ontario

I ENJOYED YOUR FEATURE "Return to Castle Frightenstein." I never had the privilege of seeing this Canadian horror host named Billy Van play such roles as The Count, The Wolfman and The Librarian – he must have been a great comedian to be able to ad-lib [as The Librarian] a lame horror story for each show. The horror hosts that I am familiar with are Elvira, Vampira and even Dr. Demento, from a San Francisco radio show. I am disappointed that you did not mention legendary San Francisco horror host Bill Wilkins, who was one of my all-time favourites, as he smoked his cigar and talked about a B-rated horror movie with his sly remarks.

Paul Dale Roberts – Elk Grove, California

I HAVE TO DISAGREE with your review of *TCM: The Beginning*. I thought it was pretty decent and can hardly wait for it to come out on DVD. The reason that I think it was decent was because it told the story of how the Hewitt family came to be when that woman found that baby in the dumpster who would later become Thomas Hewitt (Leatherface). Even the dinner scene was an homage to the classic original, and I especially liked the part where the jeepload of kids crashes into that cow. I also have the new DVD editions of *TCM: The Ultimate Edition* and *TCM2: Gruesome Edition* and all I can say about *2* is that it's about time.

Ron Ferrell – McDermott, Ohio

AS CO-PRODUCER of the Criterion Collection *Equinox* DVD, I'd like to extend my appreciation for Paul Corupe's fine article on the release in *RM#59*. Paul and I conducted two interviews for his piece – one by phone and the other through email. In the process, some of my comments on the influence of *Equinox* were unfortunately taken out of context. In the article, I'm quoted as saying that "*Equinox* is a transition point from the traditional effects that go back to Harrybausen and even George Méliès, to the modern digital effects we see now. You watch this homemade foam rubber hat-monster swooping shakily through the miniature trees and you realize that these amazing kids are on their way to movies like *Star Wars*." The following is a portion of the email I sent to Paul, which better represents my thoughts on the legacy of this cult classic. "What makes *Equinox* unique as a horror-fantasy film? You can sure look at the young talent and ingenuity involved in the production, and see it as a harbinger of the visual effects revolution that was just around the corner. One good example is the flying demon sequence created by Dennis Muren and Dave Allen. It employs a variety of traditional techniques like stop-motion, cel animation and forced perspective, but the *way* these tricks were used was new and vibrant. They're combined with things like jump-cuts and hand-held photography of the actors for a sequence that looks unlike any other monster movie of the time. There is an energetic, verité-like quality to it. You watch this homemade" I recognize the need for editing, but in this case, a few sentences make a big difference. Many thanks for your attention to this matter, and best wishes for the continued success of your excellent magazine.

Brock DeShane – address withheld

I JUST WANTED TO say thank you for the mention in your magazine (*RM#58*). It helped to make our event turn out amazingly well. In our first year we have had over 200,000 unique visitors to our website, ran the hugely successful Zombie Fest 06, now have two fully downloadable zombie makeup guides on the web, have done a makeup demonstration for the Leicester Film Festival and on top of that we have successfully promoted zombie cinema and enabled two British zombie films to get makeup artists and extras they would not have had otherwise! If you want to see how Zombie Fest 06 went, please check out our website. Thanks once again, we are doing Zombie Fest 2007 in August and will probably send you some more details as we get them!

Zombie Ed – terror4fun.com



Dreadlines

News Highlights Horror Happenings

Kubrick's lost genre script coming to theatres

Director Stanley Kubrick was nearly 30 years into a film career that spanned almost five decades when he made his first horror film, 1980's iconic *The Shining*. But as recently uncovered manuscripts indicate, his first foray into the genre might have come much earlier, if only his filing system had been a little tidier.

Seven years following his death, three new manuscripts that Kubrick had either worked on or commissioned have been discovered by his family, and will soon be committed to celluloid – more than 50 years after they were stuffed into steamer trunks and lost during his move from London to Hollywood in 1961.

Written in the 1950s, the works were recently discovered by Kubrick's son-in-law Philip Hobbs, who worked with the director for twelve years (including co-producing the 1987 war film *Full Metal Jacket*). While two of the finds were full scripts – a Kubrick original called *God Fearing Man*, about a bank-robbing priest, and an anti-war road movie titled *The Down Slope*, written by American Civil War historian Shelby Foote – the most exciting find was an 80-page treatment for a dark mystery thriller called *Lunatic at Large*, about an axe-murderer who escapes from an asylum.

"I knew what it was right away, because I remember Stanley talking about *Lunatic*," Hobbs explained in a recent interview with the *New York Times*. "He was always saying he wished he knew where it was, because it was such a great idea."

Penned in the late 1950s by pulp noirist Jim Thompson (*The Grifters*), who collaborated with Kubrick on 1956's *The Killing* and his 1957 breakthrough *Paths of Glory*, *Lunatic* was to be Kubrick's next project until circumstances placed him at the helm of *Spartacus*, which launched the director into stardom. The treatment was packed away and lost until this past fall; now, plans are in motion to finally bring *Lunatic* to the big screen.



Stanley Kubrick with Jack Nicholson on the set of his iconic horror film ***The Shining***

Produced by Charles Finch (*Ghosts*) and Edward R. Pressman (*Wall Street*, *Sisters*), the film will be helmed by leading British commercial director Chris Palmer, working off a screenplay fine-tuned by veteran UK television writer Stephen R. Clarke. Colin Farrell has been offered the lead role.

As Palmer tells *Rue Morgue*, the film is set in 1956 New York and revolves around the titular escaped lunatic and a number of people who are tracking him down. The filmmaker is hesitant to say much more, for fear of giving away the pivotal twist ending.

"It's a really simple, well-written and gripping story, and I'm not doing the plot justice at all, I know," he says from his home in London. "It's not *The Sixth Sense*, but if you asked me to tell you what *The Sixth Sense* was about, it would be difficult to do that without giving it all away."

Though some young directors might be daunted by the prospect of making their feature film debut with a project that brings with it such lofty expectations, Palmer insists he's more than comfortable with the assignment.

"I guess doing your first film is the most difficult one, but this film is great because it's a well-written, simple story that takes place over the course of a day, and it's not complicated," he says. "In production terms, it's a lot simpler than some of the commercials I've been involved with. From a structural point of view, it's a very good first film. Some directors might have a problem with the whole Kubrick thing, but that's not a concern for me at all."

Lunatic at Large is currently in pre-production and is expected to be released in 2008.

Chris Boutet



Stuart Gordon tackles true crime in latest film

He may have built a career adapting some of the more fantastical H.P Lovecraft stories – including *Re-Animator*, *From Beyond* and *Dreams in the Witch-House* – but Stuart Gordon is taking a turn for the real-life macabre with his new film *Stuck*.

Written by John Strysik (*Tales from the Darkside*) and starring Stephen Rea (*V for Vendetta*, Douglas Buck's *Sisters*), Mena Suvari (*The Rage: Carrie 2* and the upcoming remake of *Day of the Dead*), and co-starring John Dunsworth (*Trailer Park Boys*) the film is based on a true incident that occurred in Fort Worth, Texas, in which a woman struck a homeless person with her car and then left him to die on the windshield of the vehicle while it sat in her garage. Rea plays the victim, Tom, while Suvari is the panicked driver, Brand, who realizes that if she helps the wounded man, it will ruin her life.

"It does sound like a Hitchcock story in a way," Gordon tells *Rue Morgue*, "but it's also very horrifying. It's about the banality of evil – that good people do awful things sometimes."

In the real-life incident, which took place in 2001, the accident victim bled to death after several hours of being lodged in the windshield of the car. The woman was eventually caught and charged with murder in 2003.

Strysik, who previously collaborated with Stuart on the horror film *Deathbed* (2002) – which the director co-produced – approached the project with trepidation.

"At first I was a bit hesitant – it was such a horrendous accident that became an even more hideous crime. I didn't want to exploit the real guy," he admits. "But I realized we're in no way exploiting him – I know nothing about him, and the character played by Stephen is a fictional character, a kind of Everyman."

Stuck was shot over a period of 30 days in New Brunswick, which was chosen because of its geographic similarities to Providence, RI, where the story is set. The province has proven to be very accommodating to the production.



Stuart Gordon on the set of ***Dreams in the Witch-House.***

"It's got a nice Gothic feel to it," says Gordon. "We've also been treated really well here. Everyone has been helpful and that's a rare thing. In Los Angeles, it's quite the opposite. I've been in situations in LA where people deliberately start playing loud music to interrupt the shooting."

Both Strysik and Gordon will have plenty to keep them busy after *Stuck* is finished. Strysik recently sold a script called *True Sons*, about the infamous murders of three civil rights workers in Philadelphia, Miss. in 1964 – as seen through the eyes of a fourteen-year-old boy – to an independent producer. He's also optioned a script that he's working on with Gordon about a real-life serial killer, and there's a new edition of *Lurker in the Lobby: A Guide to the Cinema of H.P. Lovecraft*, which he co-wrote with Andrew Migliore, just hitting shelves.

Meanwhile, Gordon will be moving on to familiar territory for fans of his Lovecraftian films, with the long-awaited fourth *Re-Animator* movie.

"We've been talking about *House of Re-Animator*, to be set in the White House," he confirms. "William H. Macy [who Gordon directed in *Edmond*] says he wants to play the President." The film, which is not yet in production, will likely begin with Dick Cheney partying too hard at a Haliburton event, having a massive heart attack and dying.

"At that point they have to bring in [re-animator] Herbert West to bring him back," says Gordon with a laugh.

Tom Murray



Dreadlines

ROADKILL

FROM THE INFO HIGHWAY

uer.ca/locations/show.asp?locid=21151
Gunkanjima is a tiny island off the coast of Japan that housed thousands of people between 1810 and 1974. Now it stands empty, a ghostly skeletal metropolis. The Urban Exploration Resource takes web surfers inside for a brief history and mind-blowing pictorial tour.

jasondaquino.com
You might need a magnifying glass to view Jason D'Aquino's work, which is sometimes rendered on matchbooks, but it's well worth inspecting. His pieces – which include Albert Fish drawn on children's flash cards! – are born of childhood fairy tale imagery, and are as grim as it gets.

hauntrepreneurs.com/for%20sale.htm
Ever wanted to own a haunted attraction but were too lazy to build one? Hauntrepreneurs can help! Visit this simplistic but otherwise handy site to find out which attractions are currently up for sale and how you can buy them.

ironcircus.com/mummification1.php
Certainly not for the weak-stomached, Playing With Dead Things follows a couple as they attempt to mummify their dead pet rat. Complete with photos and excellent descriptions of their trial-and-error process, modern mummification has never been so strangely engaging.

theshadowlands.net/places
If you are planning a trip and want to squeeze in some spectral sightseeing at your chosen destination, you won't want to leave home before consulting this extensive list of haunted locales across the continental US and around the world. Happy ghost hunting!



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Compiled by Monica S. Kuebler
Got a Roadkill suggestion?
E-mail a link to, **roadkill@rue-morgue.com**

Film adaptation of Poppy Z. Brite's *Exquisite Corpse* in the works

Queer fear may soon hit a new level of popularity with the impending adaptation of best-selling author Poppy Z. Brite's critically acclaimed 1996 novel *Exquisite Corpse*. The project, optioned by up-and-coming independent British filmmaker Simon Rumley (*The Living and the Dead*), is the first of Brite's horror novel to be translated to screen.

The unique book, which follows a pair of brutally sadistic homosexual serial killers as they set their sights on the same victim (a young man named Tran), is often cited as being Brite's (*Lost Souls*, *Drawing Blood*) most effective and violent novel-length genre entry. It was also her last, as she retired from writing horror shortly thereafter.



"I loved the basic premise that this is essentially a ménage-à-trois," explains Rumley, "But whilst it maintains the traditional elements of 'who's in love with who,' it raises the stakes by posing the inevitable question, who's going to kill who?"

He adds that the book's gay theme, atmospheric New Orleans setting and hardcore but contextually imperative bodily mutilation also drew him to the story. "I've always thought it had the potential to become a truly classic American film," he notes.

Even with *Exquisite Corpse*'s gay sex slayings taken into consideration, Rumley, who is also writing the screenplay, is confident that the subject matter will not polarize the film's potential audience.

"The fact that this will repulse some people means that for exactly the same reasons – harsh violence/gay sex – it will attract others," reasons Rumley.

The project is still in its earliest writing stages, with Rumley just having secured the rights to the novel this past October, after four months of negotiations.

"I'm planning on keeping most of the key incidents [from the book]," he says of his screenplay. "Probably the main difference will be greater development of the Tran character – the guy both serial killers fall in love with. In the novel, Tran is believable and identifiable but I'm keen to highlight his loneliness, his confusion and, at times, his isolation."

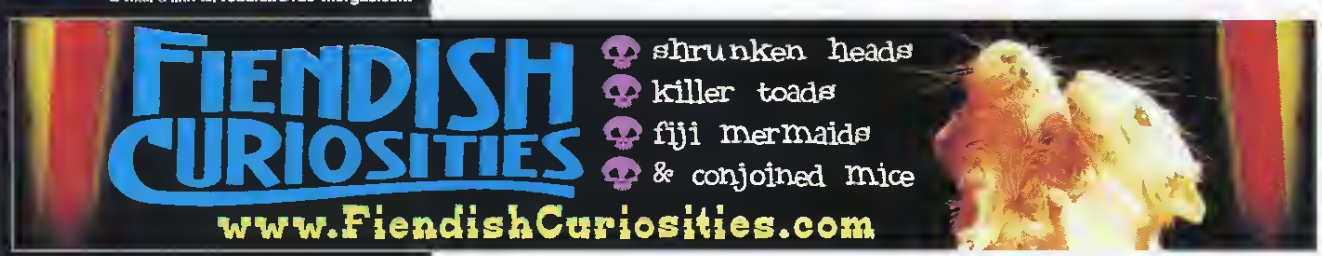
By focusing on Tran's humanity and vulnerability – themes he's already touched on in his 2006 art house psychological feature *The Living and the Dead* – Rumley hopes to make the character more endearing to audiences, creating greater tension than exists in the novel. But it's something he won't have any input on from Brite. While her agent reported that she is pleased with the option, she also made it clear to the filmmaker that she did not wish to be involved in the production. In fact, her only request regarding the work's adaptation was the Rumley treat the city and people of New Orleans with respect. It's something Rumley hopes to do by filming the movie primarily in and around the city, with just a few days of shooting in his hometown, London, England.

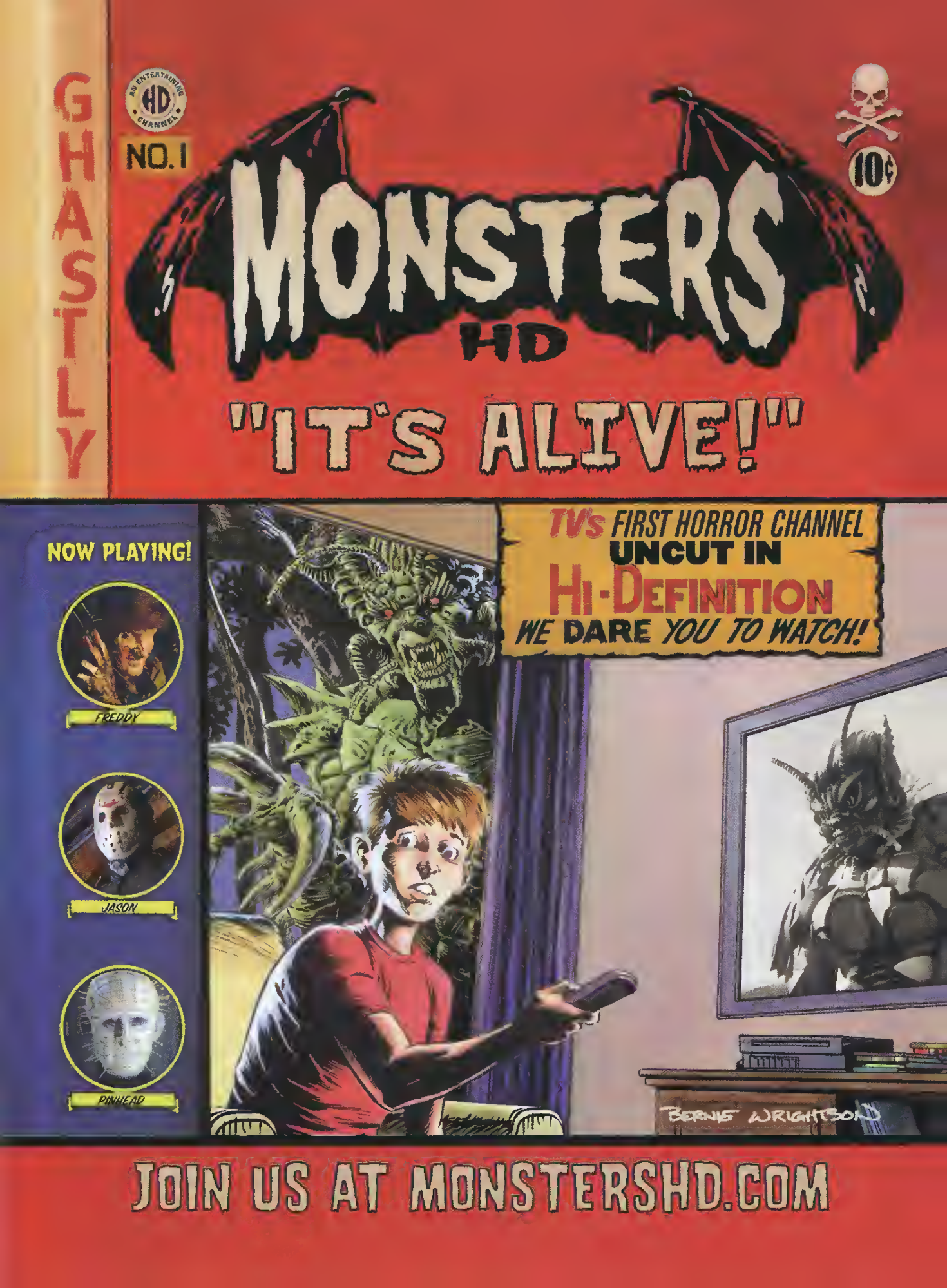
Funding and key cast have yet to be determined, but the filmmaker is hopeful. Both his short film *The Handyman* and *The Living and the Dead* have served to set the stage for attracting prospective financiers.

Like his feature (which is currently touring film festivals), Rumley hopes *Exquisite Corpse* will be an intelligent film with an artful aesthetic and visual style to match – a step above the average slasher flick.

"Ultimately, I want it to have the same value that any successful film has – lead characters who the audience can get emotionally involved with," says Rumley. "I'll be going for a lot of character development and a slow-burning dread. It certainly won't be a Michael Bay/MTV-style [feature] with lots of noise and frenetic editing."

Monica S. Kuebler




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THE CORONER'S REPORT 13

Weird Stats
Morbid Facts

✚ Bulldogs were bred into existence for the sole purpose of bullbaiting, a popular form of public entertainment in olden-times England, where audiences watched the dogs rip apart live bulls.

✚ No less than ten characters in Joe Dante's 1981 werewolf flick *The Howling* are named after werewolf movie directors including George Waggner, Roy William Neill, Terence Fisher, Freddie Francis, Erle C. Kenton, Sam Newfield, Charles Barton, Jerry Warren, Lew Landers and Jacinto Molina.

✚ In 1960s Tennessee, attacking someone with a lethal weapon while wearing a disguise was a crime punishable by death

✚ Lon Chaney Jr.'s given name was Creighton, but according to many Hollywood historians he was railroaded by studio executives into adopting his famous father's name.

✚ An entomophagist is someone who deliberately eats bugs.

✚ After the release of the 1978 film *Coma*, in which characters were murdered for their internal organs, organ donations dropped by 60 percent.

✚ Two weeks after Mariesa Weber's family reported her missing, her sister discovered her corpse lodged upside down behind a bookshelf in the family home. Authorities believe that Weber tumbled headfirst into the space from the top of a dresser and suffocated

✚ The various neck-cracking sounds heard in *The Exorcist* were created by twisting a leather wallet.

✚ For his dissertation, Thai art student Kittiwat Unarrom made a series of startlingly realistic human heads and body parts entirely out of bread and other everyday baking supplies

✚ All the snow that appeared in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* was actually salt.

✚ Holy relics were so greatly coveted during the Middle Ages that among Henry the VII's most valued possessions was the left leg of Saint George.

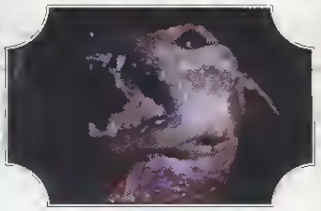
✚ At the time of its release, Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* was not only banned in Paris, France, it also caused a riot during its San Francisco premiere

✚ In mid-1800s England the average age of death for working-class men and women was 22

Compiled by **Monica S Kuebler**
Got a weird stat or morbid fact?
Send it through to info@rue-morgue.com

The Rue Morgue SICK TOP SIX

Instances of KILLER CANINES



1. *The Thing*
Malevolent mutt mutation
2. *The Beyond*
Dickie the demonic German Shepherd
3. *Brotherhood of the Wolf*
Oversized armoured assassin
4. *Suspiria*
Savage spellbound hound
5. *Cujo*
Rabies-ravaged St. Bernard
6. *Zoltan: Hound of Dracula*
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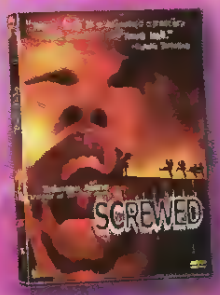
Sex & Fury



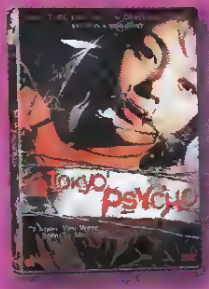
Female Yakuza Tale



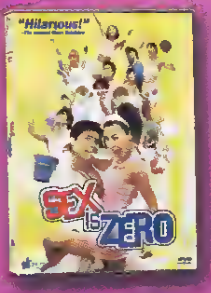
Blind Beast vs. Killer Dwarf



Screwed



Tokyo Psycho



Sex is Zero



The Uninvited

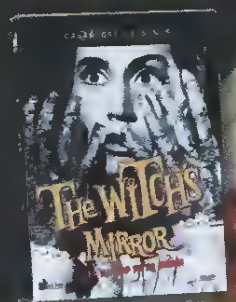
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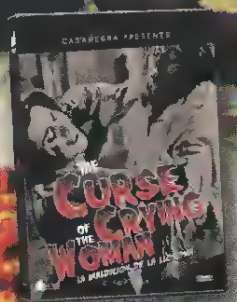
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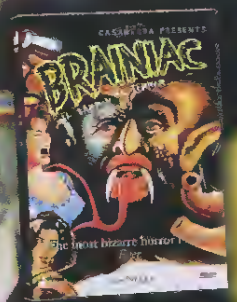
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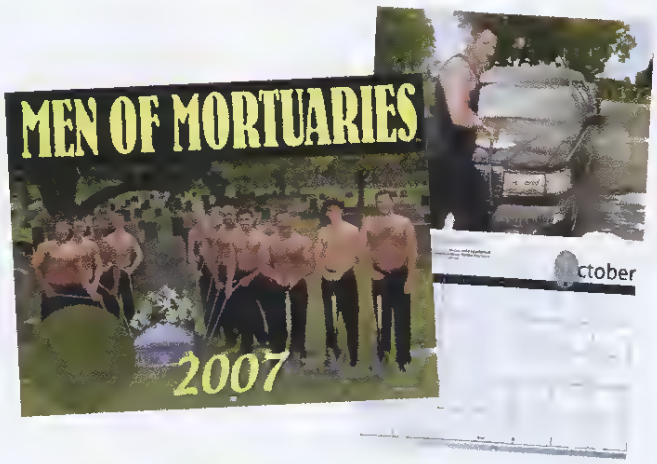


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THIS MONTH, DIRECTOR JOON-HO BONG BRINGS NEW STYLE AND SUBTEXT TO THE CLASSIC CREATURE FEATURE WITH THE HOST, KOREA'S HIGHEST GROSSING MOVIE OF ALL TIME.

IT CAME FROM THE HAN RIVER!

BY BRAD ABRAHAM • INTERVIEW BY BRAD ABRAHAM AND DAVE ALEXANDER

To describe South Korea's position in the world as precarious is the classic definition of an understatement. With a nuke-equipped leader to the north and a mass of itchy trigger fingers to the south, west and east, the Korean people have fears and anxieties that have manifested themselves in some of the most startlingly original horror films gracing screens today. From the operatic aesthetic of Chan-wook Park (the *Vengeance* trilogy) to Ji-woon Kim's nightmarish puzzlebox *A Tale of Two Sisters*, Korean horror cinema stands apart from its neighbouring brethren. It also proves that what we blanket term "J-Horror" doesn't begin and end with nonsensical plots and ghostly girls with long back hair, because there's also a monster of a creature feature hailing from Korea, called *The Host* (*Gwoemul*).

Unlike most monster movies, there is no slow reveal in *The Host* – the stage is set quickly. The idyllic Han river, which bisects the capital city of Seoul, provides a refuge for the working class unable to afford a countryside getaway; in the heat of summer, thousands gather on its banks to relax, fish and swim. For them, it's a small bit of paradise; for Kang-du Park (Kang-ho Song), it's his livelihood, where he works at a small food stand, providing as best he can for his beloved daughter Hyun-seo (Ah-sung Ko).

On a sunny day, people picnic, take in the sights – and photograph a massive sack hanging from the Han River Bridge. This bucolic landscape turns to sudden bedlam when the sack unfurls, drops into the river, climbs up onto the riverbank and crushes, tramples and devours scores of screaming victims. Gang-du and Hyun-seo flee for their lives, but the amphibious beast grabs the young girl in its jaws and disappears back into the river. A living nightmare begins.



"ALL THE CLASSIC MONSTER MOVIES LARGELY DRAW FROM A MISTRUST OF AUTHORITY AND [*THE HOST*] IS NO DIFFERENT."

JOON-HO BONG

While the government quarantines everyone who witnessed the rampage, Kang-du mourns the loss of Hyun-seo – until he receives a cellphone call from her. She's alive, in the monster's lair, and time is running out. With the obstructive government denying the creature's existence, and the U.S. army running interference to cover up a mistake of their own creation, Gang-du must rally his bickering family (father, sister and brother) to rescue Hyun-seo from the clutches of the terrifying Host.

The Host is Joon-ho Bong's metaphor for American military occupation, globalization and Kim Jong-il's apocalyptic ambitions, wrapped up within the conventions of the rampaging monster subgenre. With its titular beast the result of the U.S. army's dumping formaldehyde into the Han (based on a true event that happened in 2000), the film is a juggernaut of nature-fights-back storytelling. Equally adept on land as it is in the water, The Host is the size of a commuter bus – nowhere is safe.

Having sold an astounding 12.3 million tickets in Korea (which has a population of only 48.5 million), it has quickly become the biggest box-office hit in the country's history. But to label it simply a monster movie is only scratching the surface. Whereas the current crop of horror films seem hell-bent in not confronting the everyday terrors we have become sadly accustomed to, *The Host* embraces them. This monster movie mash-up combines *The Thing*, 50-plus years of *Godzilla* movies and the canon of Steven Spielberg (notably *Jaws*) into a package that, although overlong at two hours, became the buzz at several prominent film festivals. That it has been so widely embraced is a testament to the fact that in horror, subtext always separates the wheat from the chaff.

Utilizing state-of-the-art special effects courtesy of a creative partnership between Weta Workshop (*King Kong*, *The Lord of the Rings*) and The Orphanage (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, *Sin City*), *The Host* is equal parts creature feature thrill ride and poignant human drama. Its blend of suspense, humour and farce may be off-putting to some, and its decidedly uneven tone will doubtlessly aggravate people looking for a straight-up monster movie, but these elements set *The Host* apart from previous *Godzilla*-inspired Korean rubber-suit "kaiju" movies, such as *Yongary* (1967) or *Pulgasari* (1985) and effects-driven big-budget fare, such as the 1998 American *Godzilla* or Peter Jackson's *King Kong*. (For more on the history of Korean horror, see p.20.)

The amicable director, a Korean Film Academy graduate and documentarian who has already been labelled the "Korean Spielberg," is poised to break out when *The Host* makes its North American debut this month.

While touring the film on the festival circuit, Joon-ho Bong speaks to *Rue Morgue* about his rampaging creation.

First off, is* The Host *a horror movie?
No, it's a family drama.

It's obviously a monster movie, though. Do you consider it a work in the tradition of* Yongary *or* Pulgasari*?
It's true there were films like *Yongary* in Korea, but they were not produced constantly, as they were in Japan; they came out sporadically. So there really is no tradition of Korean creature films. [*The Host*] comes from my mutated desire to make a creature film. So it really doesn't have anything to do with [previous] Korean creature films. … I knew a *Godzilla*-size monster would not work for this type of story. It had to be a realistic size, and something the audience would buy into and believe. It had to be something that was physically imposing but could hide in places where it could jump out and scare both the characters and the audience!

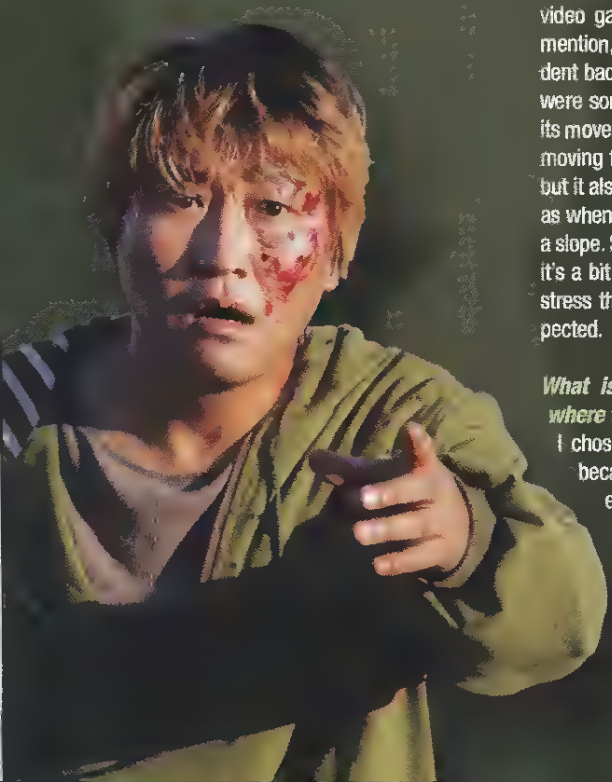
This movie has a much different feel than a kaiju movie, as well. It's much more realistic and character-driven.





Amphibian Attack: *The Host goes on a rampage along the riverside, and (below) the Park family's bumbling son gasps in terror as the creature emerges.*

I have always been a fan of *Godzilla* movies, as you can tell by watching the film. But what always put me off them was, for the most part, the human characters were scientists, soldiers and reporters – people I could not really relate to. I am sure you will find most will not relate to those people in authority because so often in real life they seem like the enemy. I wanted my heroes, the family running the store alongside the Han river, to be more easily identifiable. They are not happy people. Life is passing them by. They are flawed, and more than slightly comical. I deliberately wanted them to be different. The mother passed away years before, and we are left with a father, his failure of a son, the daughter striving for the Olympics and the other son who has all but abandoned them. If the mother, who is typically the strongest person, is gone, the family will be more interesting to watch because she's gone. They are working-class people who struggle just to make a living, and when that livelihood is taken by the monster along with the youngest [family] member, they have no choice but to band together, because those authority figures – soldiers, scientists and reporters – are unable and unwilling to do anything.



The creature itself has been described as very Lovecraftian. What influenced its look and unusual movement?

I haven't read Lovecraft, but the creature design wasn't influenced by novels, other movies or video games. It was inspired by reality. As you mention, it looks real; there was a pollution incident back in the '80s, in the Han river, and there were some mutated fish with twisted backs. For its movements, it has an unique, acrobatic way of moving from beam to beam beneath the bridge, but it also makes some clumsy movements, such as when it slips on a rainy road or tumbles down a slope. So when you see the monster, sometimes it's a bit cute, or a bit stupid, or fierce. I want to stress that the nature of The Host is very unexpected.

What is the significance of the Han river, where the titular monster dwells?

I chose the Han river as central to *The Host* because in Seoul it is a place people pass by every day, like the Empire State Building in New York. It's a place for the working class to enjoy, not so much the wealthy and privileged. It is their playground. People spend every night there in the summer if they do not have air conditioning. But when the monster appears and causes chaos, this place of safety and enjoyment becomes much more dangerous and much more alien – which was another great monster movie!

It certainly parallels* Alien *in the opening scenes, but also when the issue of quarantine and infection become greater.

And it is also very close, I think, to John Carpenter's *The Thing*, which is a favourite of mine. All the classic monster movies largely draw from a mistrust of authority and this is no different. The evils of unchecked science play a role in my film like they do in the greats. Not to say mine is as great! [Laughs] But people are distrustful of authority, in this day and age particularly – they always have [been]. History has shown many times that governments do not always tell the truth. If it is much more convenient to lie, they will.

On that note, many critics view this film as a metaphor for the war in Iraq. Is this a case of people reading subtext into the film that isn't there or is the film a deliberate commentary?

It is a bit of both. I will say that such connections to the war in Iraq are very clearly intended, but not exclusively limited to that war. The inspiration came from a famous story in Korea about the U.S. army dumping toxic chemicals into the Han. When people discovered this, they were furious. But when the government and the media said there was no worry, that the levels of poison would not harm anyone, people believed it, even though dead fish would wash up on the riverbank. Because the people in charge said everything was safe and it clearly was not, people still believed what they were told because they were told to trust the government! And often we find the media is just repeating what the government says, rather than trying to find out if they are lying or not. But at its core, this is a Korean film that is a criticism of my country's society. This poor family fights back, fights the government, and fights all these other obstacles to expose the truth.

Do you think that explains why* The Host *has become the biggest hit in Korean cinema?

Yes. And I do believe that it has been a success not because it is a monster movie, but because it's about this family that is very normal and weak. They have to go to war with this creature because nobody else will. Korean audiences can relate to them.

Why is that?

Because the Korean War never ended. We have a country to the north that is a very frightening place and South Korea is still technically at war with them. With America, China, Russia and Japan surrounding us, all armed, it is natural for Koreans to feel weak, to feel surrounded by danger. To have this family band together to save



(Wo)man vs. Monster: "[This family] has to go to war with this creature because nobody else will," says director Joon-ho Bong.

their loved ones, it is very inspiring to the Korean people. That is why, I think, it has been such a success.

Is the film also in some ways a metaphor for the occupation of South Korea by the American military?

Not all American soldiers are [bad], but it is very true that there is pollution caused by American military bases and crimes committed by American soldiers. It happens with other countries where American soldiers are stationed, and the film starts from the instant of the toxic chemical dumping, that's the origin of *The Host*, so I put symbolism and satire in the film that comments against the Americans.

What would you say the title of the film means, then?

The biological meaning is that it's the opposite of a parasite – it's the host of a deadly parasite. But actually, in the film there is no virus! So "The Host" could mean "the big bluff" as well. Another meaning is that it represents everything evil – it's everything that gives the family a tough time.

There was an article online that mentioned the film wasn't originally intended to have a monster in it at all. Is this true?

From the very first phase of the project it was a creature film. But in Korea, people think creature films are childish – for children – so I hid the fact that it was creature film for the first year [of production] while doing interviews. I said it was a "disaster" film happening around the Han river. … I did it to protect the film from the prejudices of the public and the media.

Even if audiences felt that* The Host *was more of a family film, it seems that they would be shocked by some of its scarier scenes, such as when the creature vomits a mass of human bones, shortly before eating a child. Are Korean audiences different in that they are more easygoing about having explicit content in their mainstream films?

It's not that Koreans enjoy violence or gore [in movies] more. I think they're similar to North American audiences. The scene you mention, with the creature throwing up the bones, some people think it's very scary, [with the inclusion] of the children, but some people find it very amusing and comical. The reactions are very different.

There is a lot of humour in the film; was it difficult to maintain a balance between laughs and screams?

It was a challenge and I believe we found a good balance, just by audience reaction. People laugh when they're supposed to, scream when they're supposed to. I wanted to use humour to help the audience identify with and sympathize with the main characters. They are funny people; they can act stupid and do stupid things. But the important thing to note is that they take the situation they are in very seriously. The humour comes out because they are dealing with an absurd situation – a giant monster in a river. Nobody has had to deal with a situation like that in real life, so I have to maintain [that] their reaction and behaviour is quite natural. [Laughs]

That balance, along with the film's polished action sequences and special effects, have resulted in some calling you the next Steven Spielberg.

And it is a huge honour for people to say that. But I think if he heard that he would not be so happy! [Laughs]

If* The Host *is a hit in North America will you follow the lead of other Asian horror directors, such as Takashi Shimizu* [The Grudge] *and Hideo Nakata* [The Ring 2], *and go to Hollywood? Will you at least make a sequel to the film?

I have no plans to direct a sequel but there are many other good directors who can do that. … I am not interested in working in Hollywood at the present. I have not really given it lots of thought, because [I am] in the middle of writing a script for my next film, which I will film at home. As long as I can make my movies my way in my country, why leave?

EASTERN FRIGHTS

Asia shock:

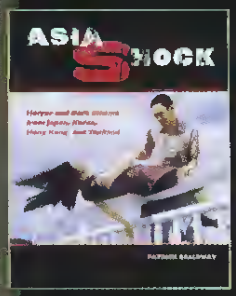
Horror and dark cinema from Japan, Korea, Hong Kong and Thailand

Patrick Galloway

Stone Bridge Press

Readers know they're in good company on the first page of Patrick Galloway's study of the dark side of Asian cinema, *Asia Shock*, when he admits an early fascination with the "morbid, the depraved...desperate acts with guns and knives... ." His ode to Asian genre cinema charts East/West differences without resorting to polysyllabic academic jargon, giving readers a crash course on how the history, religions and cultural mores of the East have created a cinema blessedly free of the Judeo-Christian dualities of good and evil, heaven and hell, and life and death.

Though about half of the book is given over to J-horror and Japan's boundary-bursting crime films, Galloway gives special attention to the new kid on the celluloid-block, Korea, whose filmmakers, he says, "express the pent-up energy and rage of a century of repression." Galloway explores the nation's budding film industry – which was heavily censored under the old South Korean quasi-military dictatorship – through extended reviews of some of the nation's darkest cinematic hours.



Especially excellent are Galloway's mini essays on Chan-wook Park's *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* and *Oldboy*, and another in which Galloway shows the influence of J-horror on *A Tale of Two Sisters* while exploring the film's distinctly Korean nuances and cultural roots. The book also introduces readers to a few lesser-known Korean gems, including the bent comedy *The Quiet Family* (remade by Takashi Miike as the insane musical *The Happiness of the Katakuris*) and Ki-duk Kim's *The Isle*, a demented fisherman's tale that may force future psychologists to devise a name for the uncontrollable fear of the common fish hook.

Fishing gear may not have been on the younger Galloway's list of weapons suitable for desperate acts, but their enthusiastic inclusion here goes a long way to explaining the increasing popularity of Korean shock cinema.

James Grainger



***RUE MORGUE* CASTS AN EYE ON THE CINEMATIC HORROR HISTORY OF KOREA, A COUNTRY GIVING RISE TO THE NEXT BIG THING IN FRIGHT FILMS.**

THE BIRTH OF K-HORROR

by LAST CHANCE LANCE

Aside from tense nuclear politics, most Westerners' knowledge of anything Korean probably ends at episodes of *M*A*S*H** and driving Hyundais. Packing a population of nearly 50 million people into an area about the size of Indiana, South Korea is a mountainous peninsula located in Southeast Asia, surrounded by Japan (which conquered and occupied it during WWII) and North Korea (ruled by dictator Kim Jong-il). It is also home to nearly 40,000 American soldiers stationed along an extensive demilitarized zone established between the two Koreas to keep the communists north of the 38th parallel.

Following the devastation of WWII and the Korean War (1950-53), most, if not all, of the films made in the country – which had mostly been pro-Japanese propaganda films – were lost forever. At the end of the war there was a marked resurgence in filmmaking, but it wasn't until the 1950s and '60s that Koreans were introduced to US films with the establishment of the first profitable movie houses. It then took a nose-dive in the '70s as the country entered the television market and the public stayed home to watch TV. Paid theatre attendance dwindled to nearly one-tenth of what it had been, marking a very dark time for the Korean film industry.

During this period, production companies were suffering through severe restrictions placed upon them by the government, which regulated everything from the number of actors they could employ to the type of equipment they could own. Films also had to pass through strict censorship boards, where they were scrutinized for subversive content.

After the success of the Seoul Olympics in 1988, however, there was a resounding call for democracy, which resulted in the military government stepping down after 32 years. Its demise also ended the stringent restrictions that had been placed on the Korean film business. Steps were taken by the government to help the burgeoning industry, including laws requiring theatres to screen domestic films for at least 146 days of the year, plus major funding increases for universities to open film departments.



The majority of Korean productions up to this point had been war films or youth-oriented comedies. Filmmakers were now free to tackle formerly taboo subjects such as North Korea or homosexuality, and they were allowed to make genre films, including, of course, horror.

Being a remarkably superstitious people, Koreans soon found themselves mining folklore fraught with ghosts, curses, revenge and reincarnation – tales well-known in nearly every village and city in the country. (Even to this day, real estate prices can be driven down if it is believed that a house or apartment is haunted.)

Despite this, during the '60s, Korean directors briefly experimented with the man-in-a-rubber-monster-suit kaiju genre, which had proved hugely successful in Japan. Hyukjin Kwon's 1967 black and white movie *Space Monster, Wangmagwi* features a gigantic reptile/gorilla/robot thing that stomps Seoul into kimchi, while Ki-duk Kim's *Yongary* (*Dae Koesu Yonggary*) from the same year, features a huge fire-breathing reptile. Korea even had its own *King Kong* rip-off with the 1976 Korean/American co-production *APE*, a 3-D movie starring a 36-foot gorilla who stampedes through the capital city after kidnapping an American actress. Other kaiju titles of note are the 1970 flick *Horror of the Crocodile* and Hyung-rae Shim's 1999 monster epic *Reptilian* (*2001 Yonggary*), which features a revamped CGI lizard creature.

Perhaps the most popular Korean kaiju movie, though, is the late Sang-ok Shin's *Pulgasari*, a remake of a 1962 film which features a giant bull-like monster made of iron that helps peasants overthrow a tyrannical leader. Its notoriety stems from the fact that Shin and his family were kidnapped by North Korean commandos and forced to direct the film for North Korean dictator Kim Jong-il, who had admired the director for years.

Even though vampires have little to no part in Korean folklore, their worldwide appeal resulted in a handful of Korean-made fang flicks. The first one, Yong-min Lee's *The Bad Flower* (1961) – based upon and incorporating footage from the 1958 Hammer film *The Horror of Dracula* –

met with only moderate success. It was followed by *The Magic Ship* (1969), *The Magic Sword of Skeleton Pass* (1969) and *She-Vampire of the Night* (1981). And in 1982, Dracula himself finally appeared, played by a Western actor who combined Lugosi's tux-wearing Count with the hissing nastiness of Nosferatu, in Hyeong-pyo Lee's *Dracula in a Coffin*. After that, vampires were almost completely relegated to the role of comical buffoons in horror-comedies like *Young-Gu Versus Count Dracula* (1992) and last year's *Vampire Cop Ricky*.

These minor sidesteps aside, the staple of the Korean horror market has always been its popular and most financially successful supernatural ghost stories. As far back as 1963, director Yong-min Lee had audiences gasping with *Bride From the Grave*, a tale that portrayed a young newlywed digging up and devouring the corpses of babies. He followed it up in 1965 with *A Devilish Murder*, where a dead girl's spirit sought revenge against her killers in the form of a cat.

In the late '90s, the rest of the world took notice. Dong-bin Kim's 1999 remake of *Ringu*, *Ring Virus*, and Tae-yong Kim's *Memento Mori* had foreign audiences clamouring for more K-horror, and the Koreans were more than willing to oblige. More recently, Korean directors have demonstrated a renewed interest in their own folklore. Ji-woon Kim's *A Tale of Two Sisters* (2003) is loosely based on the Korean folk tale of Jangwha and Hongryeon, a pair of girls who had to live in a house with their wicked stepmother and how they exacted their revenge; Su-Chang Kong's 2004 movie *R-Point* is centred around an island (just south of Korea) with a long history of massacres and strange disappearances.



Over the last few years, a wave of Korean horror cinema has flooded North America at film festivals and on DVD. Byeong-ki Ahn found success with his movies *Phone* and *Witchboard* (see sidebar); Chan-wook Park has enjoyed considerable acclaim with his revenge trilogy *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance*, *Old Boy* and *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance* (*RM#51*); and female directors have explored the genre with Jae-yeon Yun's schoolgirl horror *Wishing Stairs* and Suen-yon Lee's terrifying thriller *The Uninvited*.

K-horror is booming, with films such as *The Man With Three Coffins*, *Whispering Corridors*, *Red Eye*, *Spider Forest* and *Save the Green Planet* finding their way into foreign homes thanks to distribution companies importing Korean genre films to North America and Europe.

With success comes the inevitable copycat syndrome, of course, and the Korean horror market is no exception. Lately, far too many of the films that make their way to North America rely on overused long-haired ghost girls or cursed objects. Nevertheless, they're still selling well. Once considered repugnant, loathsome and unworthy of funding, horror films are quickly becoming the most profitable and successful genre in Korean film history. There have even been a number of genre-friendly Korean International film festivals launched, including the Puchon International Fantastic Film Festival.

Korean festival audiences are vocal, rowdy and enthusiastic about their films. Theatre seats are assigned and it is not uncommon for premiere screenings to become raucous – even riotous – affairs depending on how they are received by the audience. There are also cultural factors contributing to the rise of genre films in Korea. For instance, it wasn't until 2004 that the government implemented a five-day work week. Before then, most of its citizens worked on Saturdays, resulting in less time to go to the theatre. In addition, most horror movies will premiere at theatres in summertime, as it is believed that scared patrons who have literally "sweated in their seats" during scary movies will not likely leave the theatres, fearing the possibility they'll catch a nasty cold.

Regardless, having broken box-office records in Japan and at home, and with several titles scheduled for big Hollywood remakes (including *The Phone*, *Witchboard* and *A Tale of Two Sisters*), Korean horror films are no longer overshadowed by the Hong Kong and Japanese markets. There has been much talk of Korea being the next horror hot spot, and with the North American release of Joon-ho Bong's monster-movie *The Host* (*Gwoemul*) – the most financially successful film to ever come out of the country – that assessment seems very likely. A non-supernatural creature feature every bit as slick as a big-budget Hollywood production, it's the best evidence yet that "K-horror" is a creature to be reckoned with.



K-Horror Carnage: *Chan-wook Park's* ***Oldboy****, (below) Ji-woon Kim's* ***A Tale of Two Sisters****, theatrical poster for* ***Vampire Cop Ricky****. Opposite: The giant minotaur-like monster Puglasari and the* ***Reptilian*** *one-sheet.*





THREE RECENT MOVIES PROVE THAT SPIRITS AREN'T VERY FORGIVING, ALMOST ANYTHING CAN BE HAUNTED, AND LONG, BLACK HAIR NEVER GOES OUT OF STYLE.

CREEPY KOREA

by LAST CHANCE LANCE

WITCH BOARD

Starring Gyu-ri Kim, Se-eun Lee and Yu-ri Lee
Written and directed by Byeong-ki Ahn
Media Blasters

Having previously directed the über-scary *Phone*, director Byeong-ki Ahn takes what could easily have been dismissed as yet another long-haired-ghost-girl story and ups the ante by having not just one, but two angry ghosts who dispatch their quarry with everything from fiery explosions and speeding trucks to a pair of scissors.

Witch Board (*Bunshinsaba*) follows a group of tormented high school girls who call upon the spirit of a former student to place a curse upon their oppressors in the hopes of ending their harassment forever. The death scenes are plentiful and disturbing, as one by one the bullies commit suicide by placing plastic bags over their heads, dousing themselves with lighter fluid and setting themselves on fire.



While viewers may draw comparisons to J-horror movies like *Ringu* and *Ju-on* (yes, the ghosts have long hair, yes, there is a curse that has been resurrected and yes, there are lots of gruesomely slaughtered schoolgirls), it's Ahn's masterful camera work combined with an outstanding, eerily atmospheric original score that helps elevate *Witch Board* above a simple rehash to tell an artful, original story of revenge from the grave.

THE RED SHOES

Starring Hye-su Kim, Seong-su Kim and Yeon-ah Park
Written and directed by Yong-gyun Kim
Tartan Video

Asian cinema has run the gamut of cursed paraphernalia over the years: possessed cellphones, video tapes, dolls, musical instruments, computers, etc., so it was only a matter of time before a film featuring forlorn footwear showed up.

Based very loosely on the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale of the same name, it centres on a woman who has found a pair of stylish red shoes (they're pink, actually) on a subway car and finds that not only do apparitions begin to appear, but that she has to fend off other women – including her own daughter – who see the shoes and want them for themselves. Any guy who's been forced to go shoe shopping with his girlfriend knows how scary that can be.



The shoes carry a curse that, ahem, *de-feets* anyone who steals them, resulting in some ghastly death scenes and gallons and gallons of the red stuff. Opening with a double-dismemberment subway station scene that's nearly as cool as the beginning of *Suicide Club* (*RM#34*), *The Red Shoes* is a lavish film filled with exquisite, vivid colours and a fantastic soundtrack that delivers the scares right up until the frighteningly original twist ending.

REDEYE

Starring Shin-yeong Jang, Ji-min Kwak and Dong-kyu Lee
Directed by Dong-bin Kim
Written by Yong-yeon Lee
iVision Entertainment

The ghostly curses continue on the rails with *Redeye*. The film begins promisingly as passengers board a midnight train from Seoul to Yeosu, which is on its last run before being permanently decommissioned. The nervous staff is convinced that the train is haunted, as years earlier several of the passenger cars were involved in a horrendous accident with hundreds of fatalities. A train attendant realizes something is seriously wrong when she moves between cars into different time periods. And then the ghosts appear.

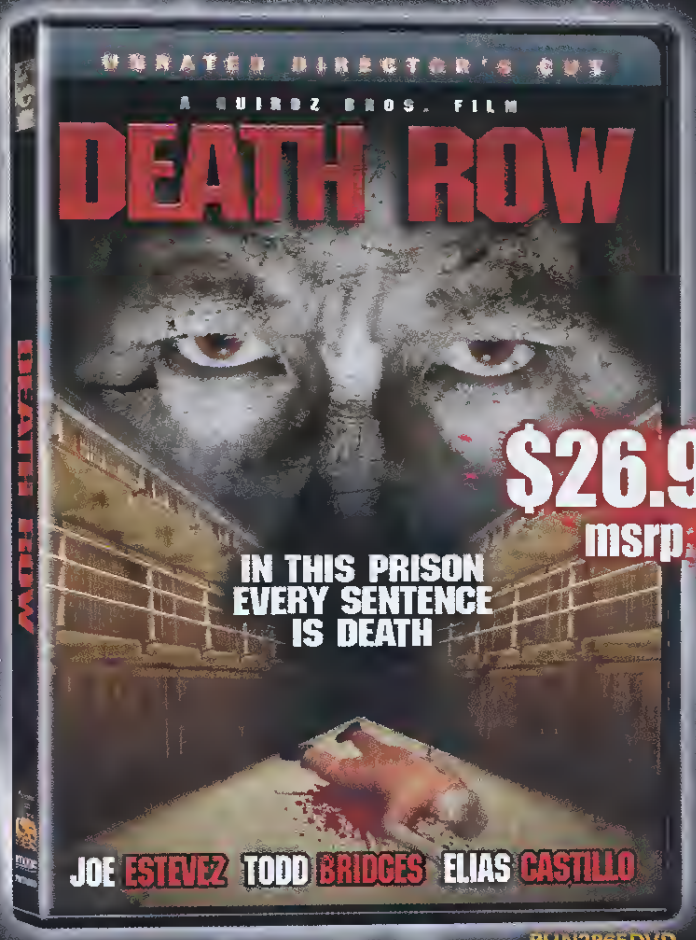


The movie is set almost exclusively in three train compartments, so director Dong-bin Kim (*Ring Virus*) had every opportunity to score huge on the fright factor but fails to provide a sense of claustrophobia or dread. The movie quickly derails as his lack of originality becomes painfully apparent. The scariest effect in the movie is a long-haired ghost girl rising out of a puddle of blood that looks like it was lifted right out of *Dark Water*.

Though entertaining, *Redeye* just chugs along, never building enough steam to have a worthy payoff. Now, if there were only some snakes on that train!

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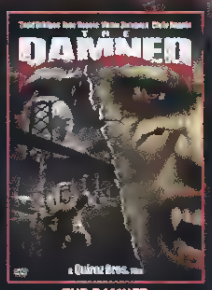
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Rue Morgue examines how the Expressionist films of the 1920s set the template for horror cinema.

SILENT SCREAMS

HOW THE HORROR FILM FOUND ITS VOICE

by Jason Lapeyre

When did horror movies begin?

Maybe with the first movie ever shown. In 1895, the Lumière brothers demonstrated their new invention, the cinematograph, in the back of a café in Paris. Legend has it that the film, of a train arriving at a station, caused the audience to flee the theatre in terror, thinking that a train was going to hit them. Obviously, this isn't a horror movie, but it illustrates just how hard it can be to decide what is or isn't one. And more importantly – who gets to decide this?

If we leave it up to many film historians, horror movies began in Hollywood in 1931, when Universal released *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*. "Before *Frankenstein*, in the silent era, there were no horror movies as the public thinks of them today," writes Roy Kinnard in the introduction to his book *Horror in Silent Films: A Filmography, 1896-1929* (McFarland & Company, 1995).



Peter Hutchings echoes this in *The Horror Film* (Longman, 2004). "The early 1930s marked the point where the term 'horror' became understood – by the industry, by critics, by audiences – as designating a particular type of film… when critics designate films made before the early 1930s as horror films, they are doing so retrospectively."

But that seems too simple and dismissive. Universal president Carl Laemmle decided not to cast Bette Davis in *Frankenstein* because he felt it would hurt her star potential, which suggests he knew what type of movie it was beforehand. And it wasn't just him. Audiences were familiar with a whole history of fear-based films before the Universal cycle, stretching back through Hollywood, Germany, and right to the experimental days of Thomas Edison and Georges Méliès.

"There was no genre in the sense of the later films, in which you had a whole series of movies, sequels and so forth," says Henry Nicolella, author of the forthcoming *The Compleat Silent Thriller*. "But you definitely have horror. Sometimes exhibitors or critics would even use the term 'horror.' Discussing *A Blind Bargain* [1922], for example, a reviewer said 'horror seems to be more common in literature and film these days,' so the term was used."

The Aurum Encyclopedia volume titled *Horror* (Aurum Press, 1996) lists 1896's *Le Manoir de Diable* (*The Devil's Manor*), directed by Georges Méliès, as its first entry. Two minutes long, it's about a bat that turns into the Devil and conjures phantoms, skeletons and witches, along with a pretty girl – it sure sounds like a horror movie. Other early entries include a 1909 Danish adaptation of Sherlock Holmes called *Den Graa Dame* (*The Grey Lady*) with a classic *Scooby Doo* plot: a man dresses up as a ghost to scare people to death and take their money. Better known is 1910's *Frankenstein*, the Thomas Edison Company's attempt to boil Shelley's 350-page novel down to ten minutes.

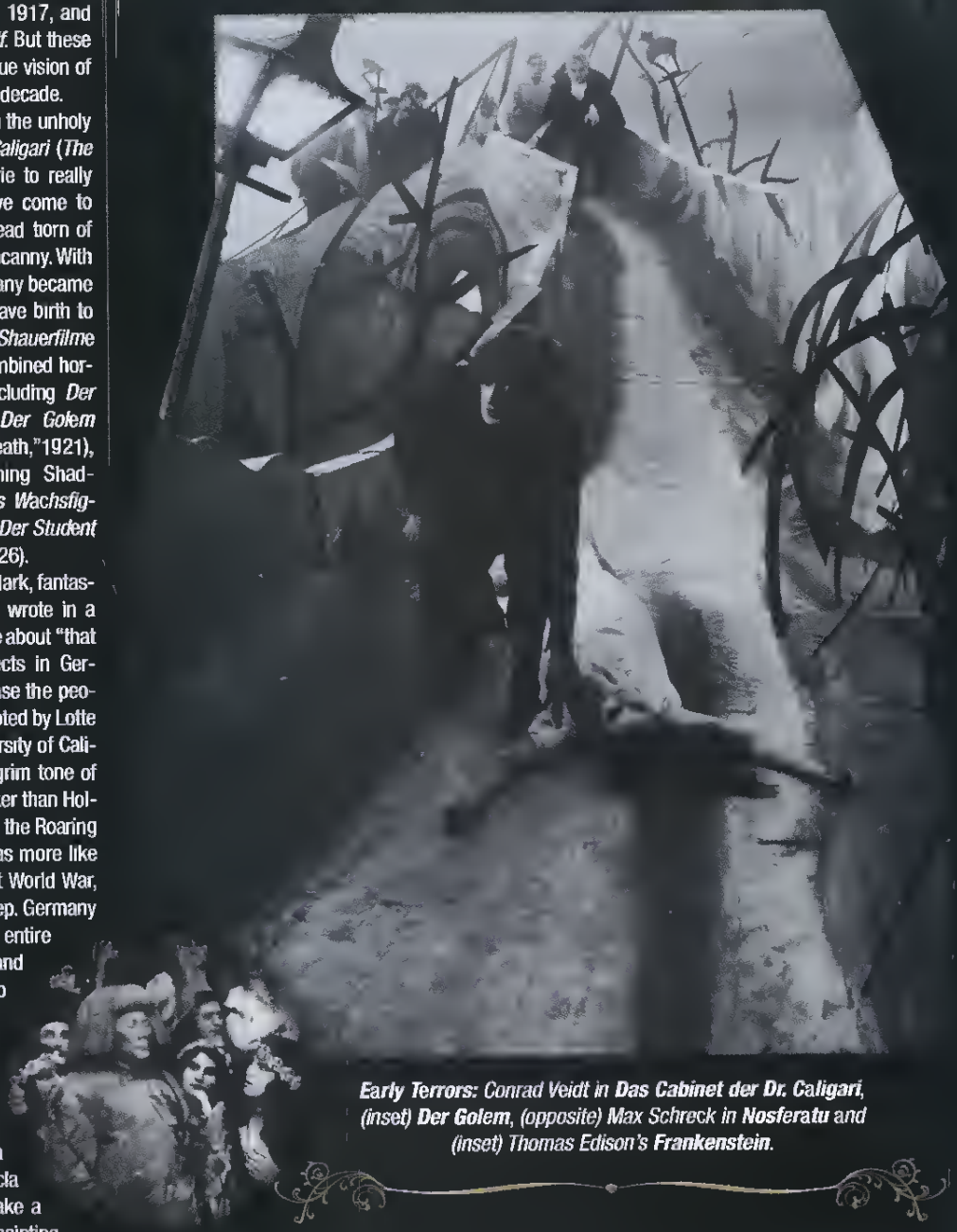
It's difficult to draw a convincing line of influence from any of these to modern horror. Méliès came from a pantomime background, where skeletons and witches were used to amuse people, not frighten them. *The Grey Lady* is better described as a detective movie and Edison's puritan *Frankenstein* wouldn't frighten a deer.

But it's fairly obvious these films laid the foundation: the '20s are littered with movies that had horror elements. The 1931 *Frankenstein* was actually the fourth adaptation of the novel, after one in 1915 called *Life Without Soul* and a now-lost Italian version in which Frankenstein's monster apparently battles a wrestler. In addition, there was a German film about demonic posses-

sion called *Hilde Warren and Death* in 1917, and even a 1913 short called *The Werewolf*. But these are still just building blocks; the first true vision of fear didn't happen until the end of the decade.

The turning point came in 1920 with the unholy horror embryo *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*), the first movie to really show off the characteristics that have come to define "horror": an atmosphere of dread born of shadows, monsters, murder and the uncanny. With that film, the haunted screens of Germany became the backbone of the genre. *Caligari* gave birth to the first swell of genre films called *Shauerfilme* (films of fantasy and terror) which combined horror plots with Expressionist decor including *Der Januskopf* ("Janus-Faced," 1920), *Der Golem* (1920), *Der Muede Tod* ("The Weary Death,"1921), *Nosferatu* (1922), *Schatten* ("Warning Shadows,"1922), *Raskolnikov* (1932), *Das Wachsfigurenkabinett* ("Waxworks,"1924) and *Der Student Von Prag* ("The Student of Praque,"1926).

The country was uniquely suited to dark, fantastic subject matter. Madame de Staël wrote in a book from 1910 called *De l'Allemagne* about "that inexhaustible source of poetical effects in Germany: terror. Ghosts and wizards please the people as much as men of culture" (as quoted by Lotte Eisener in *The Haunted Screen*, University of California Press, 2002). As a result, the grim tone of silent European horror was much darker than Hollywood's. Where the United States had the Roaring Twenties, Europe underwent what was more like the Weeping Twenties. After the first World War, horror was on everyone's front doorstep. Germany got it worst of all. Not only was an entire generation of their men traumatized and mutilated, the country was forced to accept the blame for starting the war. The Germans knew what terror was really about: repression, insanity, the subconscious and darkness.



Early Terrors: *Conrad Veidt in* ***Das Cabinet der Dr. Caligari****, (inset)* ***Der Golem****, (opposite) Max Schreck in* ***Nosferatu*** *and (inset) Thomas Edison's* ***Frankenstein****.*

It didn't take long before someone figured out that dread could be a financially viable commodity. The Decla film studio in Berlin had an idea: make a movie in the style of Expressionist painting – the hugely popular art movement born out of Germany's pathos – and sell it to overseas markets. Hans Janowitz wrote a script about a magician, Dr. Caligari, and his act, a somnambulist named Cesare who roams the city at night, murdering at Caligari's command.

The studio asked Fritz Lang to direct it, but he had a prior commitment. Instead, they hired veteran director Robert Wiene, who decided to make it as outlandish as possible to reflect the insanity of the times: paint shadows right onto the sets, distort the architecture and force perspective into a nightmarish realm. *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* was a masterpiece of paranoid delusion, perfectly suited to Germany's troubled national temperament.

Nevertheless, some scholars claim it isn't a horror movie. One argument posits that it was aimed at educated, wealthy people who wanted a little art with their entertainment – what we'd now call "the art house crowd." They went because they loved Expressionist painting, not because they wanted to be scared. Fear was apparently not the goal, therefore the film is nof considered "horror" by some.

Enter F.W. Mumau, an art historian-turned-filmmaker who shot an early adaptation of *Jekyll and Hyde* before embracing Expressionism, making a couple of masterpieces, going to Hollywood, making the greatest silent film of all time, then being killed in a car crash in Santa Barbara (while fellating his fourteen-year-old Filipino chauffeur, Garcia). He said his goal as a director was to film thought itself, and in 1922 the thought he wanted fo capture was "I am afraid." He chose to adapt *Dracula*, and instead of paying for the rights, just changed the characters' names. Thus, Count Dracula became Count Orlok, and the film became *Nosferatu*.

Even though Mumau wanted an Expressionist look for *Nosferatu*, he didn't shoot it on sets, like *Caligari*. He shot it on location in Germany and Slovakia, and distorted his world by other means: looming archways that seem to imprison the characters, shadows stretching around corners as Orlok hunts his prey, low or high-angle camerawork that shrinks or enlarges his actors' bodies. But the strangest distortion of all was in the fiendish features of Max Schreck, the actor who plays Orlok. One of the greatest casting choices of all time, Schreck plays Orlok so convincingly that his very appearance has become iconic. (To top it all off, "schreck" means "terror" in German.)

While *Caligari* requires some effort to sit



Ruth Weyher is tormented by shadows in ***Schatten*** *and (inset) a fallen nun submits to the will of Satan in* ***Häxan****.*

through today, *Nosferatu* is still gripping. The scene where Orlok creeps up the stairs, his shadow slinking around corners and clutching the heroine's heart, is as chilling as anything in the history of horror cinema. The film was a phenomenal success in Europe and cemented Murnau's reputation as Germany's most artistic filmmaker – except with one person. Bram Stoker's widow sued him and won. A British court ordered all copies of the film destroyed and the negative burned. But, the British order was difficult to enforce outside of the country and copies survived. Like the very undead creature the film is about, it could not be killed, and Murnau's film lives on as a beautiful and terrifying classic.

Despite the fact that *Nosferatu* is based on the same source material as Universal's *Dracula*, and that its subtitle is "A Symphony of Horror," some academics still don't consider it a *horror* film – something primarily aimed at instilling fear and providing visceral thrills.

But a Danish film from 1922 stands above the rest. Called *Häxan: Witchcraft Through the Ages*, it's creepier, more controversial and just as innovative as any of the German films, and also virtually unclassifiable. Its director, Benjamin Christensen, who spent two years researching witchcraft and devil worship, cast himself in the film as both Satan and Jesus. The movie starts off like a slide show lecture, with still images showing how ancient cultures depicted the devil. It's very much like a documentary from the perspective of a modern, scientific man. Christensen casually dismisses the naïve superstitions of the uneducated past and promises to show us just how ignorant we used to be.

The film then switches from documentary to drama, recreating this past and showing us a witch snapping fingers off a withered hand to make a gruesome potion. Later, one of the witches is captured by the church and tortured until she confesses her devil worship. The film then abandons modern science completely and dives headfirst into the witch's rambling fantasies of dancing demons, an orgy of witches lined up to kiss the devil's ass (literally!) and Satan taking a naked woman while another demon watches them and churns butter in a very suggestive fashion.

What really makes *Häxan* so fascinating, though, is how it breaks all the rules of movie storytelling just to freak out its audience. The story stops at regular intervals so Christensen can speak to us directly. At one point, during a section about the different torture implements used by the church to extract confessions, we see a shot of a pretty young woman and the intertitle, "One of my actresses insisted on trying on the thumbscrew… I will not reveal the terrible confessions I forced from the young lady in less than a minute."

Later, we learn that during a break in shooting, the elderly woman playing the tortured witch confesses that she really had seen the devil, and that he appeared at her bedside. It's hard to know what to make of these moments, which add another layer of darkness to the already macabre events. Here we have not only witches, demonic possession and the devil, but a director who knows enough about the genre to break free of it to further unnerve his audience. From the sophisticated makeup to the monster jumping out from behind things, not to mention the ominous feeling of not knowing what to expect next, the experience is just as frightening as watching *Nosferatu*. With *Häxan*, the filmmaker's intention is stated, and the intent is to horrify (see p.28 for a look at a new book on the film).

While the Europeans dug deep into their scarred post-war psyches to take the first bold steps in horror cinema, Hollywood producers were just skimming the surface. "In the '20s, there was a real reluctance to try to frighten the audience," says Nicolella of the American films. "There was an attempt to balance any kind of horror element with something else, often comedy. The closest thing you have to a horror genre in the teens and '20s is the 'old dark house,' mystery-comedy film, like *The Cat and the Canary* [1927]."

The one exception to this trend was the work of a man named Lon Chaney. This one actor represents the bulk of the authentic horror films of the American silent era because, more than anyone else in Hollywood, he wanted to plumb the depths of the monster's soul. Chaney developed his talent for pantomime as a child, forced to communicate with his deaf-mute parents through facial gestures. An early career in theatre honed his giff for makeup and prosthetics and he eventually became known as "The Man of a Thousand Faces."



He first got attention playing a criminal with no legs in 1920's *The Penalty*. Cinched into a harness that bent his lower legs up 180 degrees and strapped them against the back of his upper legs, Chaney could only act for twenty minutes at a time before his feet went numb. It caused permanent damage to his legs, but his rep



A new book takes stock of silent horror's most bizarre movie and the man behind it.

HERE THERE BE WITCHES

by Jason Lapeyre

It's about time someone wrote a book about *Häxan: Witchcraft Through the Ages*. This unclassifiable movie lives up to the title "World's Strangest Film" and remains a unique viewing experience some 84 years after it was made. In his verbosely titled new book *Witchcraft Through the Ages: The Story of Häxan, the World's Strangest Film, and the Man Who Made It*, Jack Stevenson puts the movie in the context of Danish director Benjamin Christensen's life and work, and it's a familiar story: the wünderkind artist who changes film history but then loses it and dies in obscurity.

"My book raises some interesting questions about what kind of character Christensen really was," explains Stevenson, speaking to *Rue Morgue* from his home in Copenhagen. "I think the borders are blurred between him making this very sober, scientific film, and on the other hand, it's his own personal fantasy brought to life."

In semi-documentary style, *Häxan* recounts the history of witchcraft (with commentary told through intertitles in its original silent incarnation), attempting to discount witchcraft as a result of devil worship and black magic, suggesting instead that women were tortured and killed not because they were Satan's minions, but rather because they were unfortunate victims of hysteria (an accepted medical diagnosis back in '22). Of course, today the hysterical woman syndrome has also been disproved as a cause of witchery (or even a valid medical illness) but it is in part what makes the film such a time capsule of early 20th century thinking.

To illustrate, the film features sensational images of witches making potions from body parts, slaughtering children for their blood, dancing with demons and holding orgies with Satan, nuns and monks engaged in sacrilegious acts, as well as scenes of nudity. Christensen himself regularly interrupts the hallucinatory proceedings, dressed as Satan, to somberly address the viewer on the topics of sorcery and torture – all still as shocking and explicit today.



Outside Denmark, *Häxan* was expectedly butchered by censors and banned outright from predominantly Catholic countries for its frank portrayal of sex, demons and sex *with* demons.

"It's a mutilated masterpiece," Stevenson explains. "And I think that was a problem with it not being considered more important – it's kind of like the film that was never seen. In England, as far as I can tell, it wasn't seen at all until 1967."

Stevenson's book chronicles the film's rise in popularity, as it's been revived over and over again throughout the last century, and there's a definite correlation between the loosening of audience Puritanism and the recognition of the importance of the film. In what sounds like a PR campaign from *The Exorcist*, Stevenson reprints a news article from a revival in 1941 telling of one audience member who was hospitalized after viewing the movie. "During some of the film's more intense scenes," the article states, "he became hypnotized to such a degree that it caused him to develop cramps."

Witchcraft Through the Ages is a worthy companion piece to the film, well-researched and beautifully illustrated with stills, archival photos and newspaper advertisements from around the world. At 115 pages, it's a little short, but still welcome considering the dearth of English-language material available about the film. The book is neither too academic nor too superficial, and overall does indeed give some real insight into the film and the man who made it.

"I think pretty clearly he intended to shock people," notes Stevenson. "There's a whole debate about whether he was this sober rationalist or kind of a sleaze merchant, or just a film director who was amazed by the power that he had."



Lon Chaney in ***London After Midnight*** *and (inset) Conrad Veidt in* ***The Man Who Laughs.***

was made: he was the maniac who would do anything to play a role.

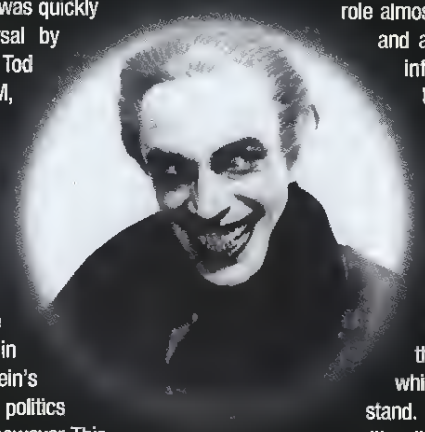
What he wanted to play most were monsters: the deformed, the forgotten and the misunderstood. With Tod Browning, himself a champion of circus freaks and twisted souls, he made a string of popular films about armless knife throwers, ventriloquists in granny drag and crippled magicians. Their most notorious collaboration is probably the lost film *London After Midnight* (1927) – not strictly a horror film but responsible for one of the most terrifying images of silent cinema. Playing a Scotland Yard inspector, Chaney dresses up as a vampire in one scene and tries to scare the suspects into confessing. Only stills from the film have survived, but with his top hat, bug eyes, razor-sharp teeth and black cape, Chaney was clearly an influence on later depictions of vampirism.

The two monsters that made Chaney a Hollywood immortal were *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923) and *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925). While the films are more romantic tragedy than horror, both feature sympathetic monsters, groundbreaking makeup and the dark, Gothic atmosphere that would become the hallmark of horror. Most interestingly, both were produced by Universal, the studio that some academics say invented the genre a few years later with their release of *Frankenstein*, another film about a sympathetic monster featuring a dark, Gothic atmosphere and impressive makeup.

In *Hunchback*, Chaney wore a 72-pound rubber hump that made it almost impossible for him to stand up. His hideous, self-devised makeup rendered him completely unrecognizable, and yet he still managed to make audiences sympathize with him. *Hunchback* was a huge undertaking for Universal, with giant set pieces, a cast of thousands and lavish costumes, but because of Chaney it was a monster hit, pun intended. The studio scrambled to replicate it, and came up with another historical romantic tragedy: *Phantom*.

Again it was a lavish production, and again it was a smash. The effectiveness of Chaney's makeup, one more designed by the actor himself, has not been dulled by time; his unmasking, as well as his appearance as "The Red Death" at the costume ball, are still chilling. Chaney proved that audiences would embrace a performer who specialized in the macabre, setting an example for every horror actor to come.

Now a superstar, Chaney was quickly wooed away from Universal by MGM. No matter how much Tod Browning pleaded with MGM, they wouldn't lend Chaney out for Browning's next picture, Universal's *Dracula*. Nor would Chaney be available for Universal's follow-up, a role that seems tailor-made for him: a pantomime performance of a sympathetic monster in heavy makeup: Frankenstein's monster. It wasn't studio politics that kept him from the role, however. This time, it was throat cancer. Poetically, Chaney lost his voice in the last days of his life, and again was forced to communicate through pantomime.



There's one final piece of the puzzle in Universal's pre-sound horror days. Again, it's not strictly a "horror" movie, but it pulls all the elements together: the German influence, the extreme makeup and the Chaney-esque sympathetic monster. It was Universal's next attempt to capitalize on their historical romance winning streak. *The Man Who Laughs* (1928) was based on another Victor Hugo novel, about the son of a nobleman punished by the king by having his face carved into a permanent gruesome smile. It was directed by Paul Leni, who got the job after Universal execs were impressed by his horrific *Waxworks*.

Incidentally, he wasn't the only director that arrived in America after the German film industry collapsed. There was also Robert Florey, who designed most of the look of James Whale's *Frankenstein* – by borrowing from the Expressionist aesthetic he was familiar with – but was left uncredited, and later went on to direct *Murders in the Rue Morgue* in 1931. It's courtesy of unsung heroes like Florey that the Universal films acquired their chiaroscuro look and not Whale, who credited the film's visual style to *The Golem*.

Leni, who also directed *The Cat and the Canary*, envisioned a shadowy, haunted film worthy of his Expressionist background. The Gothic sets were designed by Charles D. Hall, who would later design *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*. And the makeup was the first assignment for Jack Pierce, who would go on to legendary status by designing all of Universal's famous monsters. Finally, the laughing man himself was none other than Conrad Veidt, who played the somnambulist in *Caligari*. Pierce fitted Veidt with oversized dentures that had hooks on them to draw his mouth back into a horrible rictus grin (note Chaney's influence). The effect was frightening enough to inspire Bob Kane's design of Batman's nemesis, The Joker in 1940.

This million-dollar production centred on a character who is disfigured in childhood, grows up a freak, is laughed at by crowds and loved only by a beautiful blind woman. It's a role almost invented by Chaney, and a good example of his influence on the later Universal horrors. Consider the endings of *Phantom*, *Laughs*, and *Frankenstein*, where a horde of townspeople chase the monster with flaming torches, fear and hate compelling them to destroy that which they do not understand. From film to film you can literally watch the steady unfolding and development of the horror genre as defined by the Universal monster pictures.

Though some consider *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* to be the beginning of cinematic horror (in part because German filmmaking never recovered from the demise of the Expressionist school and Hollywood has ruled the roost ever since), these films didn't just emerge from nothing, and audiences recognized the continuity between them and their predecessors. Horror cinema existed long before the Universal horrors. And if you don't believe that, watch *Nosferatu* tonight with the lights off... and make up your own mind.

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"ONE OF THE
GREATEST MONSTER
MOVIES EVER MADE."
– NEW YORK MAGAZINE

"'THE HOST' IS THE MOST
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SCARY-FUNNY MONSTER MOVIE
IN MANY A SEASON.
HANDS DOWN THE YEAR'S BEST
GENRE ENTERTAINMENT
AND THEN SOME."
– Scott Foundas, LA WEEKLY



ARRIVING IN THEATRES MARCH 2007
www.hostmovie.com
magnolia

A UNIQUE BOOK DETAILING THE DUBIOUS BISTORY OF THE FUNERARY VIOLINIST ATTEMPTS TO ESTABLISH A NEW DEATH HITUAL WITH AN ANCIENT FEEL.



The Forgotten Guild of FUNERARY VIOLINISTS

BY JAMES GRAINGER

Who hasn't indulged in fhe ultimafe morbid fantasy. imagining yourself at your own funeral? Looking over the shoulders of friends, family and ex-lovers who only now realize, too late, they should have appreciated your unique personality more, you see the splendid silk-lined coffin lying in a coral reef of flowers – and a lone violinisf dressed in black playing a funereal dirge that wrings the tears from every mourner's eyes

That last detail may not be standard fantasy funeral fare, but if Rohan Kriwaczek, acting president of the Guild of Funerary Violinists, has his way, the solitary violinist will soon be a fixture at funerals, bofh imaginary and real. Kriwaczek, a British musician, street performer, recording artist and aufhor, is on a mission to restore dignity, grace and genuine gut-wrenching mourning to contemporary Western funerals. His solution: create a "forgotten" guild of like-minded musicians to spread the practice of funeral violin across England, aided by a new book detailing the art form's dubious history.

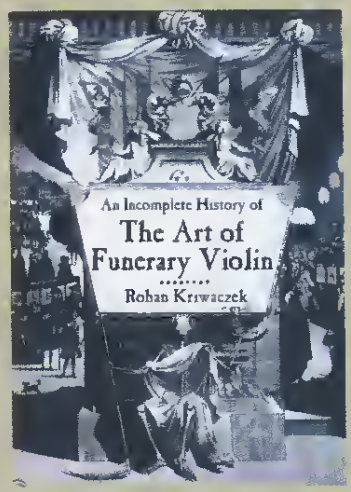
"I feel that modern funerals have become sterile affairs, leaving those gathered at a loss as to what to feel and how to express it," Kriwaczek tells *Rue Morgue* from his home in Brighton, England

Today's funerals are structured around either the rehearsed, high-sounding platitudes and ceremonies of organized religion or the embarrassed, fumbling speeches of secular funeral services. What mourners really need, Kriwaczek argues, is catharsis, a way fo express their feelings of loss, anger and sadness, and what better way to tap those emotions fhan music?

"Of all the arts," he says, "music has the most power to influence and

express emotions that the conscious mind cannot begin to grasp. And naturally, one of the most difficult emotions to express is grief, as it contains the inexplicable awareness that someone's life has ended."

Enter the Guild of Funerary Violinists, with its long, stoned history of drawing tears and wails at the driest of Protestant funerals – until the Great Funerary Purges of the 1830s, when the Vatican and other religious institutions, fearing the Guild's growing popularity with the masses, began persecuting the organization, expunging the historical record of the Guild's existence and forcing its practitioners underground. In *An Incomplete History of the Art of Funerary Violin* (Duckworth Overlook Press), Kriwaczek explores the Guild's forgotten history, one filled with enough missing links, conspiracies, shadowy figures and Vatican malfeasance to give *The Da Vinci Code* a run for its money.



There is, however, one catch with Kriwaczek's exhaustive efforts to revive the musical practice and restore it to cultural prominence, and that is that the Guild of Funerary Violinists and their repertoire of marches, laments and dirges did not exist until Kriwaczek invented them a few years ago. That's right, the history, the songs and the Guild itself are all figments of his ripe imagination.

Or they were. The art of the funerary violin may not date back to the 16th century and no librarian will ever file Kriwaczek's book in the history section, but the Guild does exist. Kriwaczek and his fellow violists do play at funerals and, as the book's accompanying CD (see sidebar) attests, there are more than enough funerary dirges for solo violin (and accompanying bass drum) to complement even the most protracted funeral.

Just as Voltaire argued that if God did not exist it would be necessary to invent Him, Kriwaczek, a student of both classical music and music history, felt the need to invent a musical form and its troubled history to help fill a very real gap in the recent history of funereal practices.

As he writes in a press release, the funerary violin project is anything but a hoax. Besides functioning as a kind of extended piece of performance art on "the nature of artistic evolution through time and the ways in which individuals and political events influence the unfolding of artistic genres," the project "is profoundly concerned with the change in attitudes towards mortality itself, and how that is reflected in our celebration of both life and death through the ages."

Kriwaczek devised the Guild and the music as a way of filling in this cultural gap. The next step was to begin writing the music he wanted to play at funerals and legitimize his fledgling artistic form with a tradition and history as complex and unique as any other musical genre.

"The music's purpose," Kriwaczek says, "is to express the inexpressible. The book's main aim is to educate the readership through considerations of how funerary practice has changed – in my opinion so much for the worse – and hopefully resurrect the awareness of what a funeral can and should be."

Kriwaczek has been surprised at the public response to the Guild. Through word of mouth, public performances and a MySpace page that has been particularly popular with goth and death metal fans (many of whom are being exposed to solo violin music for the first time), the Guild's notoriety continues to grow. To date Kriwaczek has played at over 50 funerals in England, calling the solo performances "the most intense and moving of concertizing situations I have ever found myself in."

He has also signed up in the neighbourhood of 50 other musicians to the no-longer imaginary Guild of Funerary Violinists. Members currently play at funerals in the UK, France, Germany and the US. The Guild is growing, but Kriwaczek remains selective about membership. "Applicants must be both auditioned and vetted for appropriate sympathies, which makes expansion of the Guild a slow process."

Funeral directors, who have long monopolized mourning rituals, have been a little slower, to say the least, in jumping on the bandwagon, though Kriwaczek remains hopeful.

"I only hope the funeral directors in the UK start taking note of the many things funerary violin can offer them," he says. "They have proven to be a conservative breed, reluctant to take on new ideas, which is why creating an ancient musical genre seemed like a better way of winning them over."

So has Kriwaczek ever imagined his own funeral?

"Strangely enough, I have never planned my own funeral," he says. "I guess it is a case of not mixing business with pleasure. However, I have long harboured a fantasy of having a mausoleum large enough for small chamber music concerts to be performed inside – both to my own remains and a small assembled audience."

For funerary violinist booking enquiries, contact bookings@guildoffuneraryviolinists.org.uk.

Gruesome Lullabies and Dirty Ballads

THE ROHAN THEATRE BAND

Perfect World

Hobgoblin Records

Though his work with the Guild of Funerary Violinists keeps him busy, Rohan Kriwaczek still finds time for his other incarnation as Rohan K, leader, singer and songwriter of The Rohan Theatre Band. Like the Guild, the band has a long and completely made-up history, dating back to the late-19th century creation of the fictitious Rohan Theatre Project, an underground collective of poets, musicians and thinkers that profoundly influenced 20th century popular and avant-guard culture.

Kriwaczek alone is The Rohan Theatre Band, writing and performing all the songs on his debut CD *Perfect World*. The opening number, "Please Remain Seated," blends the surreal cabaret melodies of Kurt Weil with the droll delivery and wordplay of Tom Waits, as Kirwaczek entreats his audience to remain seated as he lays out his still-bleeding heart on the tabletop for their listening pleasure. Jaded listeners these days demand blood, tears, sex and something shocking, and Kirwaczek delivers nothing less than the promised goods.

The songs on *Perfect World* catalogue every conceivable human vice, folly and variety of emotional mayhem, combining these morbid musings with gallows humour and a surprising blend of theatrical, classical and folk music stylings. The end result is a collection of disturbingly hummable, gruesome lullabies and dirty ballads that could have come directly from the lips of that seedy Old World uncle who kept asking you to sit in his lap after he'd had a few drinks.



Don't be scared by titles like "The Undertakers Ball" and "Boneless Joe" – the album contains enough wit, irony and gutter poetry to keep the proceedings from generating into a pity party. And as Kriwaczek reminds us on one of the album's future singalong classics: "There's no need to be scared/For everybody's happy to be dead, when they're dead." *Perfect World* is available at rohank.co.uk.

James Grainger



MAP OUT THE COMING YEAR IN HORROR WITH THIS INDISPENSIBLE GUIDE TO THE TOP GENRE EVENTS IN NORTH AMERICA.

THE DEFINITIVE 2007 HORROR CONVENTION SCHEDULE

JANUARY 26-28
FX
Orlando, Florida
www.fxshow.com

JANUARY 26-28
CHILLER THEATRE
Toy, Model and Film Expo
Secaucus, New Jersey
www.chillertheatre.com

FEBRUARY 15-18
HAUNT N WEEKENO
Los Angeles, California
www.hauntx.com

FEBRUARY 16-18
MONSTER-MANIA CON 7
Cherry Hill, New Jersey
www.monstermania.net

FEBRUARY 23-25
NEW YORN COMIC CON
New York City, New York
www.nycomiccon.com

FEBRUARY 23-26
TRANSWORLO'S NATIONAL HAUNT & ATTRACTIONS SHOW
Wholesaler's Convention
(not open to general public)
Rosemont, Illinois
www.hauntshow.com

MARCH 2-4
HORRORFINO WEENENO
Baltimore, Maryland
www.horrorfindweekend.com

MARCH 29-APRIL 1
WORLD HORROR CONVENTION
Harror Lit Expo
Toronto, Dntario
www.whc2007.org

MARCH 30-APRIL 1
CINEMA WASTELANO
Drive-In Era Movies and Memorabilia
Strongsville, Dhio
www.cinemawasteland.com

APRIL 27-29*
CHILLER THEATRE
Toy, Madel and Film Expo
Secaucus, New Jersey
www.chillertheatre.com

MAY 4-6
HAUNTCON
National convention and tradeshow for haunted attraction and Halloween industries.
Dearborn, Michigan
www.hauntcon.com

MAY 18-20
MONSTER-MANIA CON 8
Cherry Hill, New Jersey
www.monstermania.net

MAY 18-20
FANGORIA'S WEENENO OF HORRORS
Burbank, California
www.creationent.com/cal/dod.htm

JUNE 22-24
MONSTER BASH REUNION
International Classic Monster Movie Conventian and Expo
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
www.creepyclassics.com/bash.html

JUNE 22-24
TEXAS FRIGHTMARE WEENENO
Dallas, Texas
www.texasfrightmareweekend.com

REEL FEAR

THE FILM FESTIVALS

For those of you who prefer movies to merchandise, catch the next big thing in horror cinema at the following festivals.

JULY 20-22
FLASHBACK WEEKEND HORROR CONVENTION AND DRIVE-IN
Rosemont, Illinois
www.flashbackweekend.com

JULY 26-29
COMIC-CON INTERNATIONAL
San Diego, California
www.comic-con.org

AUGUST TBA
TWISTED NIGHTMARE WEEKEND
Middleburg Heights, Ohio
www.twistednightmareweekend.com

AUGUST 10-12
HORRORFIND WEEKEND
Baltimore, Maryland
www.horrorfindweekend.com

AUGUST 24-26
MONSTER-MANIA CON 9
Cherry Hill, New Jersey
www.monstermania.net

AUGUST 24-26
RUE MORGUE FESTIVAL OF FEAR
Toronto, Ontario
www.rue-morgue.com/festival.php

AUGUST 31-SEPTEMBER 3
DRAGON CON
Atlanta, Georgia
www.dragoncon.org

OCTOBER 5-7
CINEMA WASTELAND
Drive-In Era Movies and Memorabilia
Strongsville, Ohio
www.cinemawasteland.com

OCTOBER 13-14
ROCK AND SHOCK
Monsters, Music and Mayhem
Worcester, Massachusetts
www.rockandshock.com

OCTOBER 19-21
SPOOKY EMPIRE SCREAMFEST
Tampa, Florida
www.spookyempire.com

OCTOBER 26-28*
CHILLER THEATRE
Toy, Model and Film Expo
Secaucus, New Jersey
www.chillertheatre.com

FEBRUARY 23-MARCH 3
FANTASPORTO
Porto, Portugal
www.fantasporto.online.pt

APRIL 5-17
BRUSSELS FESTIVAL OF FANTASY FILM
Brussels, Belgium
www.bifff.org

APRIL 26-29
DEAD BY DAWN
Edinburgh, Scotland
www.deadbydawn.co.uk

JULY 5-23
FANTASIA FILM FESTIVAL
Montreal, Quebec
www.fantasiafestival.com

AUGUST 24-27
FRIGHTFEST
London, England
www.frightfest.co.uk

SEPTEMBER 6-15
TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL: MIDNIGHT MADNESS
Toronto, Ontario
www.e.bell.ca/filmfest

SEPTEMBER 28-OCT 7
SHRIEKFEST
Hollywood, California
www.shriekfest.com

OCTOBER 5-7
THE H.P. LOVECRAFT FILM FESTIVAL
Portland, Oregon
www.hplfilmfestival.com

OCTOBER 6-7*
SHOCKERFEST
Modesto, California
www.shockerfest.com

OCTOBER 10-14
EERIE HORROR FILM FESTIVAL
Erie, Pennsylvania
www.eeriehorrorfest.com

OCTOBER 12-21
SCREAMFEST
Hollywood, California
www.screamfestla.com

OCTOBER 17-22
THE HOLLYWOOD HORROR SCI-FI AND FANTASY FILM FESTIVAL
Hollywood, California
www.hollywoodawards.com/horror.html

OCTOBER 18-24
TORONTO AFTER DARK FILM FESTIVAL
Toronto, Canada
torontoafterdark.com

OCTOBER 25-28
RHODE ISLAND INTERNATIONAL HORROR FILM FESTIVAL
Providence, Rhode Island
www.film-festival.org

OCTOBER 24-28
NEW YORK CITY HORROR FILM FESTIVAL
New York City, New York
www.nychorrorfest.com

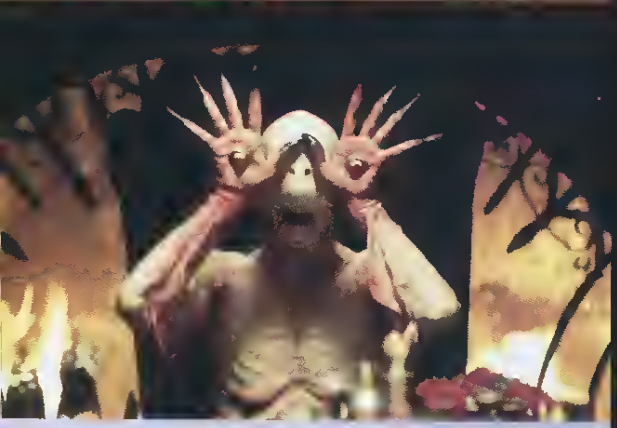
OCTOBER 26-28*
THE INTERNATIONAL HORROR AND SCI-FI FILM FESTIVAL
Tempe, Arizona
www.horrorscifi.com

NOVEMBER TBA
SITGES FANTASTIC FILM FESTIVAL
Catalonia, Spain
www.sitges.com

*Date(s) subject to change











R.I.P 2006

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

The year came and went, and with it a strange company of flaccid genre entries. Apart from Alexandre Aja's *The Hills Have Eyes*, there were too many clumsy and irresponsible remakes (*The Wicker Man, The Omen, Pulse, When a Stranger Calls, 2001 Maniacs, Night of the Living Dead 3D*). Add to this the unimpressive sequels/prequels (*The Grudge 2, The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning, Return of the Living Dead: Necropolis*) plus aimless gorefests (*Hostel, Saw 3*) that made their way to theatres and DVD, and we were left to do more retrospective cover stories than ever.

With the exception of a few new releases – notably Guillermo del Toro's masterful dark fairy tale, *Pan's Labyrinth* (*RM#63*), Neil Marshall's refreshing subterranean monster flick, *The Descent* (*RM#58*), Fabrice du Welz's *Calvaire* (*RM#61*) and Takashi Miike's *Masters of Horror* episode "Imprint" (*RM#59*) – and some great DVD reissues, the year was a bit of a low point for the horror genre. It's a bad sign when the Rue Crew unanimously agrees on the following list – which means there wasn't much debate about what we saw and enjoyed – but that's the way it went down.

Likewise, our message board members agreed that the best film of the year was James Gunn's woefully neglected *Slither*, though *The Descent* was a close second. And in case you're wondering why this horror comedy got top marks, it's because, although the film was misunderstood, it's a well-crafted, clever and gooey homage to *The Thing, From Beyond, Shivers, Night of the Living Dead, The Deadly Spawn, The Fly* and *Squirm*. It should never have been so quickly disregarded by the horror community, so we're making sure it gets its due here.

As such, here's our list of what we feel you should have seen, listened to, played and read, and a few things you should have missed...

BEST FEATURE FILM
Slither
Universal

BEST FEATURE AS VOTED BY THE MEMBERS OF THE RUE MORGUE MESSAGE BOARD
Slither
Universal

BEST INDIE FEATURE
Head Trauma
Heretic Films

BEST SHORT FILM
The Call of Cthulhu
Lurker Films, Inc.

MOST INNOVATIVE CONCEPT
Pan's Labyrinth
Picture House

BEST FIRST FEATURE
Calvaire
Palm Pictures

GUILTIEST PLEASURE
Rock 'n' Roll Nightmare
Synapse

BEST MONSTER
"The Pale Man" (Pan's Labyrinth)

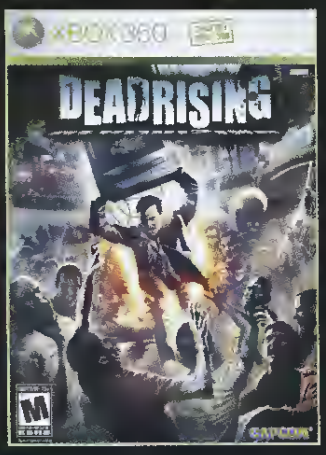
BEST DEATH SCENE
Slither (woman – engorged with slugs – explodes)
Universal

GORIEST SCENE
Saw 3
(shotgun shell decapitation)
Lionsgate









MOST HORRIFYING SCENE
Imprint
(prostitute torture)
IDT/Anchor Bay

BEST COMEBACK
The Hilarious House of Frightenstein
Critical Mass

BEST SPECIAL EDITION DVD
Gojira
Sony Wonder

MOST WELCOME REISSUE
Let's Scare Jessica to Death
Paramount

BIGGEST DISAPPOINTMENT
Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning
New Line Cinema

WORST CINEMATIC ATROCITY TO WOUND YOUR RETINAS
Return of the Living Dead 4: Necropolis
Aurora

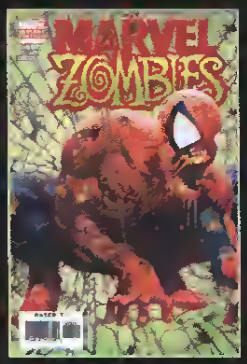
BEST TELEVISION
"Imprint," Takashi Miike's Master of Horror episode
Showtime/Anchor Bay

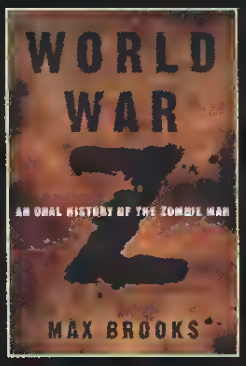
BEST SCORE
The Descent
by David Julian
Cooking Vinyl

BEST MUSIC REISSUE
This Island Earth
Monstrous Movie Music

BEST POSTER
Calvaire
Palm Pictures







BEST FICTION BOOK
World War Z
by Max Brooks
Crown Publishing Group

BEST NON-FICTION BOOK
Lurker in the Lobby:
A Guide to the Cinema of H.P. Lovecraft
by Andrew Migliore and John Strysk
Night Shade Books

BEST ART BOOK
Famous Monster Movie Art of Basil Gogos
Kerry Gammill and J. David Spurlock, eds.
Vanguard Publishing

BEST COMIC BOOK
TIE: Sight Unseen (*Image*)
Marvel Zombies (*Marvel*)
by Robert Tinnell and Robert Kirkman

BEST COMIC BOOK ARTIST
Nick Postic
Impaler
Image

BEST HORROR GAME
HorrorClix
WizKids

BEST VIDEO GAME
Dead Rising
Capcom

BEST TREND
Horror podcasts

MOST ANTICIPATED IN 2007
30 Days of Night

LEAST ANTICIPATED IN 2007
Day of the Dead (remake)



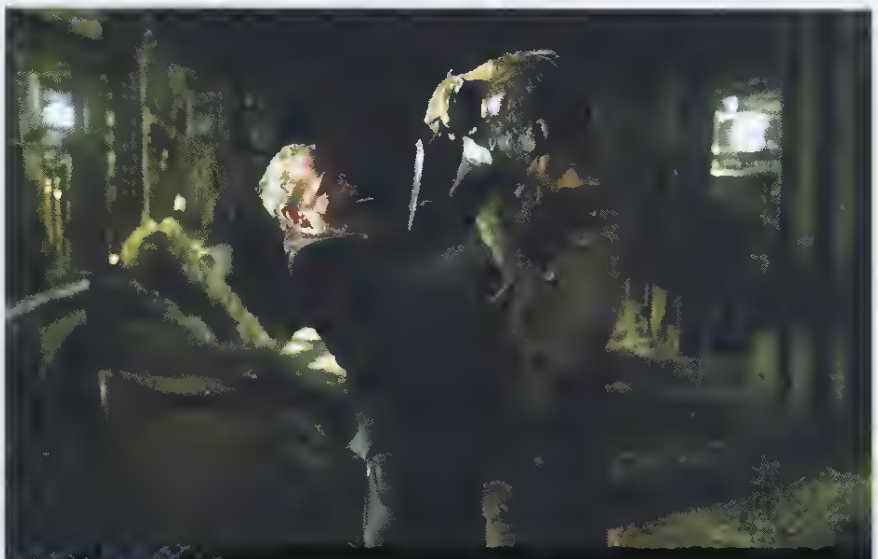






Film, Video, Dvd & Reissues

CINEMACABRE



Robert Englund on the opposite end of the killer's blade in ***Behind the Mask.***

PSEUDO-SLASHUMENTARY

BEHIND THE MASK: THE RISE OF LESLIE VERNON

Starring Nathan Baesel, Angela Goethals and Robert Englund
Directed by Scott Glosserman
Written by Scott Glosserman and David J. Stieve
Glen Echo Entertainment/Code Entertainment

In the early 1980s, slasher films sliced and diced their way to the top of the horror heap, but more than two decades later, the countless sequels, copycats and remakes have started to resemble their superstar executioners: lumbering, mechanical and unrelenting. That doesn't mean innovation is dead, however, as *Behind the Mask: The Rise of Leslie Vernon* is a fresh and frequently hilarious deconstruction of everything we love about slasher cinema.

Taking the postmodern reflections of *Scream* and the mockumentary mayhem of *Man Bites Dog* one step further, *Behind the Mask* gleefully eviscerates the well-worn archetypes of the subgenre, and lays bare the symbolism and inner mechanics of these often-maligned films. Imagining the real-world logistics that might be involved in planning a horror movie-style teen massacre, the film follows student journalist Taylor (Angela Goethals) and her film crew as they document aspiring iconic slasher Leslie Vernon (Nathan Baesel) while he lays the groundwork for a night of bloodsoaked infamy.

The pitch-black fun is in watching Leslie meticulously create the illusion that he is a supernatural serial killer back to take his revenge. From planting phony newspaper clippings in the local library to selecting a virginal "survivor girl" with just the right mix of dim-witted pals, *Behind the Mask* doesn't just lazily parody the genre, it explores all the familiar touchstones to reveal the hidden Freudian subtexts that have made these films so popular.



Much of *Behind the Mask*'s success is due to Baesel's energetic and supremely likeable turn as Leslie. "This is my Christmas," he explains, weepy-eyed, after sabotaging the flashlights and nailing shut the windows at the scene of his premeditated crime. But when Leslie dons his mask in the last half hour, he is transformed into the familiar emotionless killer, and the film's comedic elements seamlessly melt away into full-tilt horror. This inspired twist not only helps to ground the lighthearted first half of the film, but it also changes the stakes, as the observing filmmakers suddenly find themselves in just as much danger as the partying teens.

Featuring a cameo by *Poltergeist*'s Zelda Rubinstein and co-starring Robert Englund, who is great as a sombre Dr. Loomis-like protector, Glosserman's surprisingly polished debut feature is as respectful to the slasher horror film as it is thoughtful, making *Behind the Mask* one of the best slasher films – or meta-slasher films – you're likely to see.

Paul Corupe

MAYBE WE'LL JUST STAY HOME

TURISTAS

Starring Josh Duhamel, Melissa George and Olivia Wilde
Directed by John Stockwell
Written by Michael Ross
Fox Atomic

You've heard the urban legend: a traveller, drugged at the local bar, wakes up in a bathtub full of ice only to find his kidney removed by members of an organ-harvesting crime ring. That little bit of folklore has been exploited on film before in 1993's *The Harvest* and again in 1998's *Urban Legend*. It's also the story that drives *Turistas*, except in this version they're drugged, have their clothes stolen so they have to run around most of the movie half-naked, then have their guts removed.

The other difference is that here they deserve it. At least, that's the murky ethical tension that director John Stockwell is hoping you'll grapple with. (His previous outing, the Jessica Alba swimwear ad *Into the*

Blue, was also a thinly veiled morality play.) The characters – all white – make all the standard mistakes we expect from their neo-colonialist travel mentalities. Obnoxious backpackers take photos of children without asking permission. They harass bus drivers for driving too fast, only to find themselves stranded when the bus gets into an accident – because the driver tried to pass a moped driven by obnoxious backpackers.

The scary bits are good: realistic enough to be threatening – a gasping escape through underwater caverns will have you grateful that they weren't harvesting lungs – but unrealistic enough to be entertaining. The movie's zealous more-is-more approach to exploitation has curvaceous asses bobbing into almost every shot, like over-ambitious extras; enthusiastic sound effects give you a jolt whenever someone opens or closes a drawer; and there's an organ removal scene that couldn't be more gut-and-liver-wrenchingly graphic, until, almost as a joke, the prize is plopped next to the disembowelled host's naked breast.

Nevertheless, said scary bits come rather late in the film, and most mystifyingly, the drawn-out third act of *Hostel*-like psycho-tension suggested by the trailer (girl strapped to an operating table, pleading with a surgeon) never quite makes it into the film. The removal is gruesome but short, and the angry-but-humanitarian doctor drugs his victims so well they can barely moan. It's grossly misleading – but not grossly enough.

Mark Moyes

THE NASAL NIGHTSTALKER

PERFUME. THE STORY OF A MURDERER

Starring Ben Whishaw, Dustin Hoffman and Alan Rickman
Directed by Tom Tykwer
Written by Andrew Birkin, Bernd Eichinger and Tom Tykwer
Paramount Pictures

No matter what the results are, hopes are always high when a name director – especially one acclaimed as much in the art world as in the commercial one – decides to take on a horror story. Sometimes the results are classic (Kubrick's *The Shining*), other times disappointing (Boyle's *28 Days Later*), and occasionally pointless (Van Sant's *Psycho*), but they are seldom uninteresting.

And that's about the greatest accolade I can bestow on *Perfume*, German wunder-director Tom (*Run Lola Run*) Tykwer's stab at not quite making a horror film, but dousing his artsy, serial killer period opus with the scent of spilled blood. Taking one of the most unusual premises ever, *Perfume* tells the story of French orphan Jean-Baptiste Grenouille, birthed amidst rotting fish only to develop a superior – almost supernatural – sense of smell.



Perfume: *An original but ultimately failed period serial killer movie.*

As a grown slave, Grenouille is taken to Paris where he catches his first whiff of woman... and lands his first kill. Later, as an adept of the heavily powdered perfumist Giuseppe Baldini (Dustin Hoffman, phoning in a performance), he is seized with the idea of creating the ultimate perfume out of – what else? – the sweet smell of female. Leaving a trail of corpses in his wake, the obsessive Grenouille turns his eye on Laura Richis (Rachel Hurd-Wood), the prize of the Parisian nobility, much to the horror of her puffy aristocratic father (Alan Rickman).

Although the science in this film is about as sound as Raelian cloning, that doesn't stop Tykwer from focusing on his killer's murderous technique, which includes shorning his victims of their hair, marinating their naked bodies in lard and distilling an olfactory ingredient with some alchemical tinkering – all of it played straight.

Some spotty voice-over narration from John Hurt and a literal climax featuring an orgy involving several hundred people eventually pass this off as a fable, but by that time you'll either be charmed, annoyed... or bored. No question, *Perfume* is a decidedly European art house affair, complete with dreamy visuals, a drowsy plot and sleepwalking characters trouncing through a budget of $50 million, making this one of the most spectacular cinematic failures in recent memory.

Still, the film is interesting and unusual. Really unusual. Its ballsy script alone, which hangs on a string of contrivances that continually dare ridicule, is worth looking into even if you decide, in the end, to call the dare. In a time when the serial killer subgenre is practically the definition of derivative, *Perfume* is – for better or for worse – a whiff of something uniquely fresh.

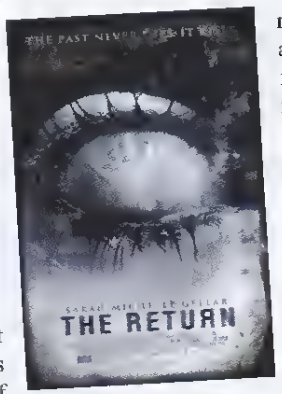
Rodrigo Gudiño

STICK TO VAMPIRES, BUFFY

THE RETURN

Starring Sarah Michelle Gellar, Sam Shepard and Peter O'Brien
Directed by Asif Kapadia
Written by Adam Sussman
Rogue Pictures

Sarah Michelle Gellar may have once ruled the TV screen as Buffy but lately she's been slumming it in the American J-horror subgenre, from that *Grudge* remake to its sequel and now this, an original story that once again finds its protagonist haunted by mysterious visions and voices from beyond. Though fundamentally weak in its storytelling, there is something about the direction and tone of *The Return* that makes you think that somehow there was a better movie in here that just didn't manage to make its way out.



Gellar plays Joanna Mills, a pickup-driving big-rig salesperson (yeah, right) who's cursed by recurring visions of a town she doesn't remember visiting and a creepy, long-haired stalker

(She also has a reputation for passing out and waking up in strange places, and cutting herself for no apparent reason.) After seeing a photo of the town from her hallucinations, she decides to pay it a visit, where she encounters the brooding Terry Stahl (Peter O'Brien), who's wrapped up in a larger murder mystery linked to a car accident in Joanna's youth.

Despite *The Return*'s PG-13 rating, it's more mature than most of today's mainstream horror. It builds slowly and quietly, with no annoying MTV-style quick edits or overdone CGI. Director Asif Kapadia seems to understand that when it comes to jump scares, less is more.

On the other hand, for the majority of the movie it's nearly impossible to understand what's going on, as the story purposefully leaves several key questions unanswered, likely as a means to sustain audience interest in its wafer-thin plot. Let's avoid spoilers and just say that by the film's weak and unbelievably simple conclusion, you'll be disappointed that you even cared in the first place.

At some point, one must wonder whether anything like this ever actually happens. Are there really people out there who are regularly contacted by ghostly apparitions, only to have everything solved suddenly over a two-day period? To give Kapadia credit, he did manage to make a sort-of interesting movie out of a very stupid and pointless story.

Aaron Von Lupton

SAY NO TO GUANO

THE ROOST

Starring Tom Noonan, Karl Jacob and Vanessa Horneff
Written and directed by Ti West
Fabrication Films

The Roost sucks, and, yes, it's about flesh-eating bats, but, no, that's not a pun. In a lame homage to late-night creepshows, Tom Noonan (*Manhunter*, *The Monster Squad*) plays a crypt keeper type who introduces the film and just kind of wanders around a haunted house for a few minutes, deadpanning. And when the movie actually starts, it's somehow less interesting than the introduction.

All the clichés are here: four teenagers driving on a darkened highway, their car breaks down, they find an old house that seems empty, they're attacked by a monster (in this case bats, which are roosting in the nearby barn) and they run screaming. Oh, and there's an appearance by actor/director Larry Fessenden (*Wendigo*) – also one of the film's producers – as a tow-truck driver.



Like staring at a blank wall, but with bats instead of nothing.

There is not, however, tension or anything else to encourage the all-important suspension of disbelief. And to top it all off, the gore effects are so bad that a mangled deer is shown in four or five really quick close-ups rapidly edited together in an attempt to cover up the shitty special effects.

Worst of all, this somewhat hyped movie is boring. Maybe in a festival setting, in a theatre with a couple of hundred diehard horror fans, it might be possible to get into the recycled clichés and long takes of darkness, but at home on DVD, it's torture.

The Roost is not like *Jaws* with bats instead of sharks. Nor is it like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* with bats instead of cannibals. Or *The Seventh Seal* with bats instead of existential angst. Hell, *The Roost* is probably not even the best flesh-eating-bat-movie-that-starts-with-"R". *The Roost* is like staring at a blank wall for 81 minutes, but with bats instead of nothing.

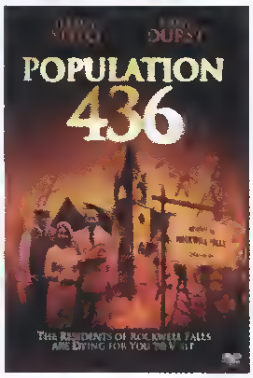
Jason Lapeyre

DO THE MATH

POPULATION 436

Starring Jeremy Sisto, Fred Durst and Charlotte Sullivan
Directed by Michelle MacLaren
Written by Michael Kingston
Sony Pictures

The town with a secret: it's an archetype that's fuelled fare as diverse as *Bad Day at Black Rock*, *The Wicker Man*, multiple *Twilight Zone* episodes and all too many Stephen King stories. *Population 436* is a love letter to town-with-a-secret films, at once familiar and suspenseful, all orchestrated with considerable finesse by director Michelle MacLaren.

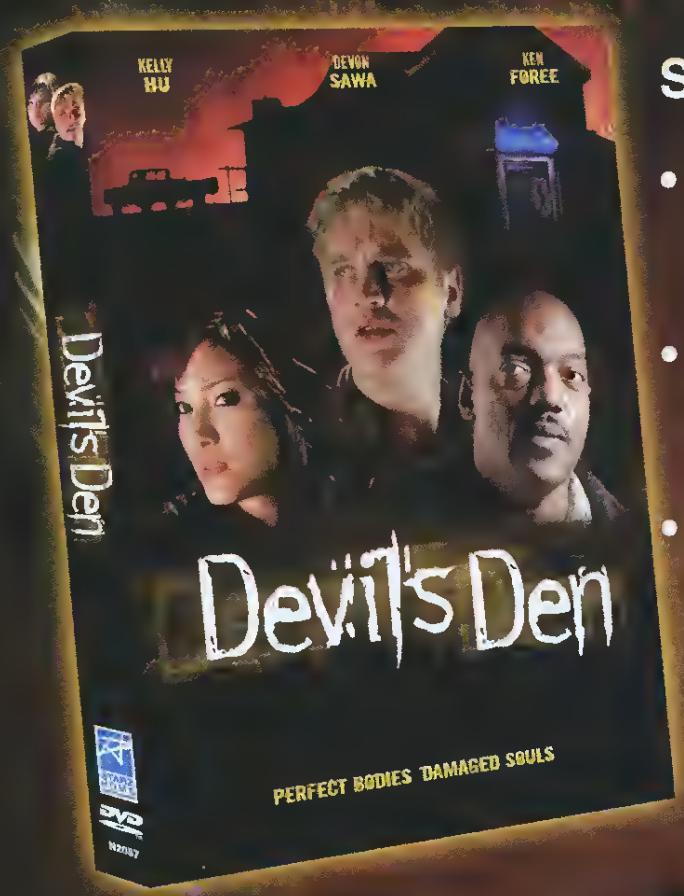


You'll likely recall that the always impressive Jeremy Sisto got chopped up by a psychotic nerd in *May* and came to a similarly bad end at the hands of backwoods cannibals in *Wrong Turn*, so his survival prospects in any horror film are a tad bleak. This time, however, he's neither an Argento-fancying auto mechanic nor an irritating Jeff Goldblum impersonator – just an average Joe named Steve from the census bureau who's naturally curious about a village whose population (436) never changes.

After snapping an axle at the edge of town, he's taken in, fed and lodged by way-too-friendly locals who skirt his questions and smilingly assure him that he'll never want to leave. Uh-oh. Of course, there are a few less-than-hospitable oddballs who clearly don't want him around but, true to the template, he's kept in the dark about why until it's too late. Further complications arrive in the form (and ooh, what a form it is) of Charlotte Sullivan, who plays a local gal who falls for Steve about as hard as he falls for her, as if the situation just wasn't volatile enough already.

The largely unknown cast is impressive, and the shocker here is a barely recognizable Fred Durst of Limp Bizkit shame, er, fame,

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GHOST OF MAE NAK

Starring Pataratida Pacharawirapong,
Siwat Chocchaicharin and Porntip Patani
Written and directed by Mark Duffield
Tartan USA

Mae Nak may be Thailand's most popular ghost. Operas have been written about her, over twenty films have been made about her, and mothers to this day invoke her name with their children, promising them she'll snap their necks and eat their heads with chili sauce if they're not quiet!



The story goes that Mae Nak was a young pregnant wife in a rural village, some 130 years ago, whose husband, Mak, was conscripted into military service. Wounded, Mak returns to his village and takes up life again with his wife and new baby. The problem is, Nak actually died in childbirth while he was away. Realizing he has been living with a ghost, Mak flees but is pursued by his wife's spirit, who kills those who come between her and her love.

This latest Mae Nak film comes just six years after director Nonzee Nimibutr's well-received 1999 version *Nang Nak* and updates the story *Ringu*-style by recasting Mae Nak as a Samara-like ghost complete with white clothes and long black hair, who haunts newlyweds Mak and Nak. The young couple buys a fixer-upper in downtown Bangkok from a shady real estate agent, which, unbeknownst to them, sits on the site of Mae Nak's former home. Thieves then steal Mak and Nak's wedding gifts; Mak spots them one day and gives chase, only to be run down and hospitalized in a coma.

But Mae Nak is protective of Mak, whom she believes is her Mak, and she gruesomely kills those who cross him, including the real estate agent and thieves. She also possesses the comatose Mak, and Nak must appease her spirit in order to save her husband.

Mostly, *Ghost of Mae Nak* doesn't work, partly because leads Siwat Chocchaicharin and Pataratida Pacharawirapong can't act, and partly because Mae Nak – glimpsed only briefly – is uninteresting.

Throw in some dodgy CGI, too many horror clichés (faces glimpsed in mirrors is big) and an awkward bit of last-minute drama that leads nowhere, and you've got another mediocre fright flick that makes me wish that Mae Nak would eat *my* head with chili sauce.

Sean Plummer

who delivers a remarkably complex performance as an awkward cop who develops a strange clingy friendship with Steve.

The soundtrack sports a suitably chilling music score by acclaimed Canadian composer Glenn Buhr. Sure, the plot devices of *Population 436* are familiar, but they're deftly handled by MacLaren and never seem hackneyed. The end result is a way-cool little psychological thriller that has me looking forward to her next effort.

John W. Bowen

WHAT ELSE IS ON?

VOODOO MOON

Starring Eric Mabius, Charisma Carpenter
and Rik Young
Written and directed by Kevin Van Hook
Anchor Bay Entertainment



TV movies are rarely good, and the comments made online about Sci-Fi Channel films invariably criticize them for poor scripting, bad acting and laughable production values. If *Voodoo Moon* is a typical SFC production, then for once the internet did not exaggerate. This boring horror show is guilty on all counts, producing in viewers a death-like malaise, probably akin to being turned into a zombie.

The film is top-loaded with genre vets – Eric Mabius (*The Crow: Salvation*), Charisma Carpenter (TV's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*), Jeffrey Combs (*Re-Animator*) and Dee Wallace (*The Howling*) among them. But stunt casting won't spawn any interest in this DOA disaster. The clearly uninterested Eric Mabius stars as Cole, a demon hunter whose parents were killed years earlier in the satanic slaughter of the small Southern town he grew up in with sister Heather (Carpenter). Cole has spent the intervening years battling the demon responsible for his parents' death and now it's time for the final showdown between good and evil.

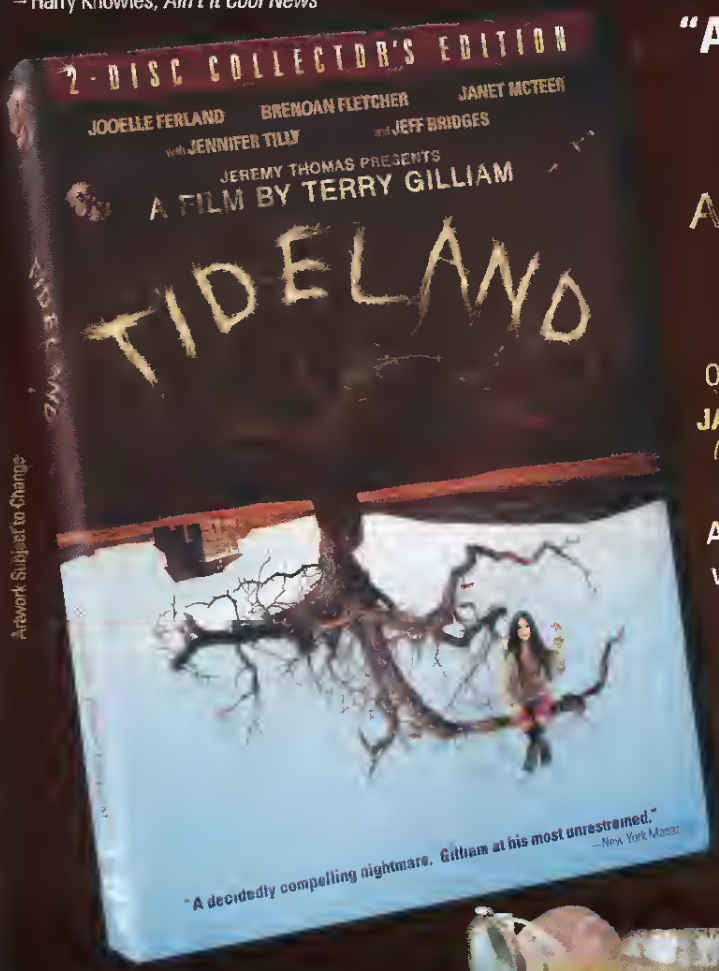
Sounds dramatic, doesn't it? It's not. Writer/director Kevin Van Hook feebly attempts to inject some originality into a clichéd script by emphasizing how Cole combines elements of various religions – most prominently Christianity and voodoo (or vodun, if you prefer) – to combat evil. Then there's Cole's ragtag group of allies, among them the ass-kicking biker, the saucy black girl, the tough Latino and the motherly healer (Wallace). None of them has a single interesting thing to say or a compelling story with which to generate empathy.

As for the demon, Daniel (Rik Young), he's about as evil as a hangnail. We know he's the Devil because he's British and sports a goatee. The only interesting actor here is Combs, who spends most of the movie shambling around in a state of rigor mortis as an undead cop who comes to Cole's aid. His presence adds a welcome touch of actual humour to an otherwise unintentionally funny film. Add crappy computer graphics, badly choreographed action and overwrought dialogue and you have more than enough reason to kill your television.

Sean Plummer

"Absolutely blew my mind.

A masterpiece. This is Gilliam untethered and unleashed. This is Gilliam in stunning form."
– Harry Knowles, *Ain't It Cool News*



"A decidedly compelling nightmare.
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– New York Magazine

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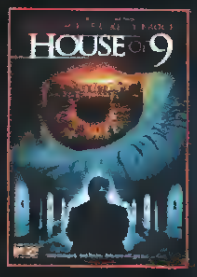
OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED

THIS ISSUE: LANCE GETS PLAYED

MANIAC MANSION

HOUSE OF 9

Visual Entertainment



Okay, let's get one thing straight: if you and I or anyone else wake up in a house after being drugged, and are informed that only one can leave alive, you better not fall asleep. *House of 9* deals with nine equally annoying people who wake up in a mansion and are informed that the last one standing gets five million bucks. Of course, they try to work together at first, but soon turn on each other as food and water become scarce and the big cash prize gets pretty fucking tasty. Though the slick twist ending is admirable, not even Dennis Hopper, who plays a completely miscast priest with some kind of indiscernible accent, can save this sucker from being condemned.

Body Count: 8
Contestants: 9

CHOP 'TIL YOU DROP

SLASHERS

MTI Home Video



From the catchy opening theme song to the slasher set piece kills, this is one of those cheesy, sleazy, low-budget movies that you're either gonna love or hate right off the bat. It features six American contestants on a popular Japanese game show where they have to fend for themselves against a maniac killer in a maze that looks like a paintball park crossed with a cheap-ass haunted house. *Slashers* may be campy in the vein of *The Running Man*, but big props to Canuck director Maurice Devereaux for bringing a reality TV look to the film, and for making good use of competently shot long takes. The major flaw is the wooden acting of most of the victims, but that's what a chainsaw is for, now isn't it?

Body Count: 8
Contestants: 6

GETTING THE SHAFT

DEATH TUNNEL

Sony Pictures Home Entertainment



Ever get that feeling that some directors just want to fuck with your head for an hour and a half? Well, *Death Tunnel* is one of those movies. Filmed in the Waverly Hills sanatorium, it has some of the most atmospheric, dreary sets ever committed to celluloid but lacks a competent script to accompany them. Enter five sexy college girls forced to spend five hours in the building as part of a college initiation prank. Why? Who knows? It's also never explained why they have to do it in their lingerie. With a non-linear script that's hard to follow and an ending that's convoluted and saccharin at best, there is no proverbial light at the end of the tunnel for this sorry flick.

Body Count: 20
Contestants: 5

Last Chance Lance

WHERE'S MY MOP?

THE MAID

Starring Alessandra de Rossi, Huifang Hong and Benny Soh
Written and directed by Kelvin Tong
Tartan USA

If you think the artwork on Tartan's DVD of *The Maid* looks suspiciously reminiscent of *Ringu* and its many imitators, you aren't far off track. Not only is *The Maid* highly derivative of other Asian horror efforts, it's a poorly made ghost film that waits until its conclusion before attempting something resembling a plot.



A rare effort from Singapore, it stars Alessandra de Rossi (*Spirit of the Glass*) as Rosa Dimaano, a poor Filipino girl who travels to the city state to work as a servant and earn money for her sick brother. According to legend, the gates of Hell are opened during the Chinese Seventh Month, ushering in legions of the undead to the world of the living. By unwittingly breaking the rules for protecting oneself during this month, Rosa becomes tormented by all manners of ghosts, ghouls and the requisite spooky, dark-haired children.

Along with the plot, the movie repeats the same cheap shock visuals, creepy sounds, and blaringly loud stingers ad nauseum. Though the dialogue is delivered in a weird mix of Mandarin and broken English, which is difficult to hear, don't crank up the volume or you'll risk blowing your speakers with these piercing effects. Having a lot of jump scares isn't necessarily a bad thing, but they would work better if they accompanied an actual story. Instead, it isn't until the final act that we learn what the heck is going on, and why the ghosts are attracted to Rosa in particular. Plenty of twists are introduced, but they're not worth caring about.

Still, *The Maid* isn't all bad, with gorgeous cinematography that makes it an admittedly beautiful, if frustrating film. Hardcore fans of Asian horror may still get some enjoyment from the movie's intensely dark tone and shock tactics, but for those of us who jumped off the bandwagon a long time ago, *The Maid* will do nothing to get you back on.

Aaron Von Lupton

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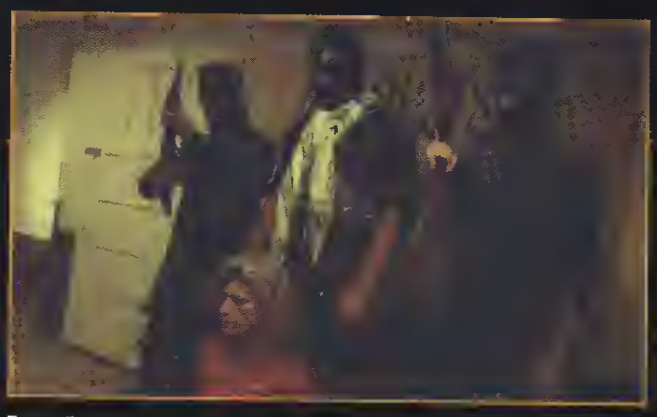
BY BRAD ABRAHAM

THIS INSTALLMENT: HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 2006 NEW YORK CITY HORROR FILM FESTIVAL.

EYES OF SAMIR

USA – 22 mins *myspace.com/eyesofsamirmovie*

Years from now, film scholars will look back at this decade's horror films in the context of the war in Iraq and the indelible image of hostages in jumpsuits beheaded on camera. Some would argue that commentary is already occurring with the *Saw* and *Hostel* franchises. But standing in stark contrast to the torture-porn aesthetic of the aforementioned series, Kevin Shulman's *Eyes of Samir* is a deadly serious account of an imprisoned journalist awaiting her death by beheading, and of her terrorist captor's crisis of faith. The mainstream media, represented by the ubiquitous Tony Todd's reporter character (Todd also starred in Shulman's previous short *I.O.U.*), sombrely condemns the kidnapping with the usual slick sentiment (cue the sobbing family members), while at the same time counting down with barely suppressed glee at the inevitable outcome. But then something happens that tips this very real world horror into something more supernatural. Taking a page from Clive Barker, the turn is shocking and bound to impress and infuriate in equal measure.



Regardless, *Eyes of Samir* is a slick looking film, and director Shulman shows a deft hand for suspense and terror that suggests a strong future in the genre. And unlike most of what passes for mainstream horror, he isn't afraid to confront the everyday horror of the nightly news.

EDDIE LOVES YOU

UK – 25 mins *darklineonline.co.uk/ely.html*



It didn't take a genius to predict *Eddie Loves You* would walk away with the Audience Favourite Award, judging by the uproarious reaction. The premise is simple: an adolescent decides it's time to put away childish things but discovers that beloved childhood toy "Eddie" won't go quietly. Employing every slasher cliché, *Eddie Loves You* ingeniously invokes everything from *The Fog* to *Sesame Street* and many points in-between. If the thought of a demented Elmo doll happily chirping his undying love for its owner while it eviscerates the competition doesn't set a smirk on your face, well, that's a pity. By the time the exorcist shows up, the film becomes too much of a good thing (imagine being held face-down in a bowl of your favourite ice cream). But utilizing seamless computer graphics, old-fashioned puppetry and stuffed toy mayhem, Karl Holt's *Eddie Loves You* is one that will doubtlessly impress both horror fans and people in the mood for something gleefully absurd.

DELIRIUM AND THE DOLLMAN

USA – 23 mins *crookedproductions.net*

Unlike any other genre, horror can shed a harsh light on real world terror, and *Delirium and the Dollman* does this to the grim spectre of child abuse. Remember the name of Andrew Lobel, whose Terry-Gilliam-meets-David-Cronenberg aesthetic takes the viewer through an increasingly dark trip into Lewis Carroll territory. His film tells the story of two sisters (Alice and Delilah) whose abusive thug of a wicked stepfather has their mother in his thrall. Trying to uncover the disturbing truth of what goes on behind mom and stepdad's closed bedroom door, the youngest crawls into a loose vent in a wall and emerges in a vast subterranean labyrinth populated by the patchwork creations of the Dollman, a demonic embodiment of her stepfather. Helped by a half-completed doll-boy, Delilah must save her family from this macabre toyland. But the real world is not intrusive as it always does, and the shocking solution



recalls the grimmest of Grimm's fairy tales. Visually stunning without being showy, the chilling nightmare imagery on display will stay with you long after the film ends.


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REISSUES



Frank Henenlotter's grimy, politically incorrect homage to The Bride of Frankenstein.

SKANKENSTEIN

FRANKENHOOKER (1990)

Starring James Lorinz, Patty Mullen and Joseph Gonzalez
Directed by Frank Henenlotter
Written by Robert Martin and Frank Henenlotter
Unearthed Films

The original *Frankenhooker* VHS release had the coolest gimmick ever. It was a "talking box" – you pushed a button on the cover and star Patty Mullen would utter her catchphrase: "Wanna date?" If only Unearthed Films had duplicated that packaging for this otherwise righteous, long-awaited release.

Following Frank Henenlotter's cult classics *Basket Case*, *Brain Damage* and *Basket Case 2*, *Frankenhooker* was part of a run of grimy, irreverent and politically incorrect (chiefly) 1980s New York splatter films that included *The Toxic Avenger*, *Street Trash* and *Slime City*. James Lorinz stars as Jeffery Franken, a scatterbrained inventor who loses his chubby fiancée Elizabeth (Patty Mullen) to the whirring blades of a remote-controlled lawn mower he built as a birthday present for her father. Distraught and in possession of her head, he concocts a plan to rebuild her as a perfect physical specimen – using parts harvested from prostitutes.

Jeffery can't bring himself to murder, though, so he develops a form of "super crack" that causes smokers to explode. He then collects their best limbs and reanimates Elizabeth (in a great homage to *Bride of Frankenstein*), but she comes back as a lurching, spasmodic streetwalker who immediately escapes into the night. Jeffery must find his creation and avoid the angry, muscle-bound pimp (Joseph Gonzalez) who wants to know where the fuck his girls are.

While very much an ensemble piece, the film works on the strength of the inexperienced leads' inspired performances. Lorinz is an unsung improvisational comic genius, and former *Penthouse* pet Mullen is delightfully twitchy as Elizabeth (sadly, this is her only film).

The disc features a flawless anamorphic print in the proper 1.85:1 theatrical aspect ratio and original Dolby 2.0 soundtrack. Extras include a full-length commentary track from Henenlotter and FX supervisor Gabe Bartalos, a 21-minute featurette on the makeup FX in the film, interviews and more goodies to bring back that gleefully greasy feeling.

The Gore-met

HAUNTED BY MEDIOCRITY

SUPERSTITION (1982)

Starring James Houghton, Albert Salmi and Lynn Carlin
Directed by James W. Roberson
Written by Bret Thompson Plate, Galen Thompson, Michael O. Sajbel, et al
Anchor Bay

How much fun is it to revisit the half-assed carbon copies of a subgenre when it's past the best-before shelf date by at least two decades? Not much. A long forgotten entry in the late-'70s/early-'80s haunted house canon popularized by the likes of *Amityville* and *Poltergeist*, *Superstition* has been revived by Anchor Bay for DVD.



Starring a lacklustre James Houghton (best known from TV crapola such as *Knots Landing* and *Dynasty*), *Superstition* finds priestly protagonist Reverend David Thompson dragging his family out into the middle of nowhere in order to revitalize a faltering Christian community. With nowhere to put 'em, the congregation spruces up a long-condemned New England house owned by the church.

Lo and behold, everyone forgets to mention that it has been haunted since the settlement's witch-hunting

days, some three centuries prior. In time, the family discovers that the big pond out back was the site of one particularly savage execution-by-drowning and that said witch is pissed, determined to exact revenge on all who cross her threshold. Revenge of the not-really-all-that-bloody kind is served up shortly.

While *Superstition*'s premise is flimsy and near-plagiarized (*Horror Hotel* anyone?), some bona fide effort does go into the film. In terms of savagery, the term "execution" is fitting. Scenes of a priest dissected by a runaway saw blade and a floor-bound crucifixion are particularly amusing.

The rest of the film, however, is much less fun. Characters are as thin as onion skin, the cinematography is amateur and even the big bad witch looks like something from the Halloween section of your local box store gussied up with a couple of lights. All of that can be overlooked – even embraced in a comical, kitschy way – but by trying to be top-notch instead of revelling in its limitations, *Superstition* is doomed to the wasteland of mediocrity

Keith Carman



Superstition: *A flimsy, near-plagiarized version of a haunted house movie.*

HEADY BLAXPLOITATION HORROR

GANJA & HESS (1973)

Starring Marlene Clark, Duane Jones and Bill Gunn
Written and directed by Bill Gunn
All Day Entertainment



Although the title suggests some kind of a weed-comedy buddy movie, *Ganja & Hess* is anything but. Fans of experimental indie films might appreciate Bill Gunn's socio-political screenplay and arty structure, but the deadly pacing will prep most late-night viewers for an early bedtime.

On paper the plot sounds exciting. Dr. Hess (*Night of the Living Dead* star Duane Jones), is stabbed with an infected voodoo bone dagger – formerly belonging to an African blood cult – by a psychotic houseguest (writer/director Gunn), transforming him into a vampire! When Ganja, the bitchy wife of Hess' assailant, visits and insists on a stay, she discovers her hubby's frozen body in the root cellar... but falls for Hess and the two form a blood union, feeding as a couple until the shadow of the Holy Cross finally ends Hess' tormented immortality.

Gunn's earnest desire to transcend debilitating blaxploitation clichés meant he had to abandon conventions, but the articulate exchanges between sophisticated characters more often recall the grating monologues of *My Dinner with Andre*. Gunn does augment his film with trippy, hypnotic interludes of nudity, an orgy of blood-splattered sex and a dab of gore, but their allegorical nature just adds another convoluted layer to an already over-ambitious narrative that would make more sense on paper than film.

The deliberate documentary style allowed the actors to do long improvised takes, and their reactions in real-time from locked camera positions are a serious creative misfire. The film feels further disjointed by the clashing use of orchestral soul music with a weird but effective mix of African folk song, primal electronic tones and the apparent buzzing from a Remington shaver whenever Hess hungers after a victim.

All Day's superb DVD reuses the highly respectful commentary track from their first release and reinstates a scene where Ganja's husband types poetry before offing himself, as well as a post-wedding stabbing sequence. New interviews and a wealth of behind-the-scenes info won't disappoint fans of this icon of anti-stereotype filmmaking, but horror geeks expecting more of a standard genre experience will be sorely disappointed.

Mark R. Hasan

A REAL FIXER-UPPER

HOUSE OF THE DAMNED (1963)

Starring Ron Foster, Merry Anders and Richard Crane
Directed by Maury Dexter
Written by Harry Spalding
20th Century Fox

Sometimes a reviewer wants to praise a film more for what it isn't than what it is.





D'AMATO AND THE 'HOFF?!

WITCHERY (1988)

Starring Linda Blair, David Hasselhoff and Hildegarde Neff
Directed by Fabrizio Laurenti
Written by Daniele Stroppa and Harry Spalding
Shriek Show



Easily pleased Italian horror fans and serious students of kitsch casting should be high-fiving each other over the release of Fabrizio Laurenti's *Witchery* (a.k.a. *Witchcraft*), a gory '80s Euro-shocker that teams two of pop culture's greatest hams, Linda Blair and (gulp) David Hasselhoff, against an unspeakable evil. Produced by legendary sleaze hero Joe D'Amato (*RM#55*) as the fourth sequel to *La Casa* (the Italian name for *The Evil Dead*), *Witchery* mines similar supernatural territory while also adding a ridiculous Blair-sploitation possession climax and many scenes of The 'Hoff sans shirt.

Blair plays a young pregnant woman plagued by nightmares who travels to a supposedly possessed hotel on a remote Massachusetts island where she once more runs into satanic evil – not to mention macho shutterbug Gary ('Hoff) and his hot virgin girlfriend. Suddenly, people are sucked down bathtub drains into other dimensions (a terrible and terribly funny optical effect) by the ghost of an evil witch (Hildegarde Neff) who wants to use her power to enter the body of Blair's unborn brat.

Meanwhile, said spectral crone is offing the rest of the cast in admittedly repulsive and creatively gruesome ways; watch out for the amazing sequence where a woman's mouth is stitched shut before she's stuffed upside down into a chimney. When Blair's hubby lights a fire, little does he know that the still very much alive woman is being slow-roasted in graphic, flesh-peeling detail.

Witchery's acting, script and direction are beyond abysmal (yes, even the great thespian 'Hoff is horrible), though, surprisingly, Blair is actually okay, giving her all to a routine role. The score by Carlo Maria Cordio (*Anthropophagus 2*) is operatic and eerie, and milks maximum suspense from the otherwise ho-hum plot. There's also ample violence and sex (in one case a hard to watch combination of the two). Ultimately, although *Witchery* often flirts with inanity, it nonetheless offers many lowbrow delights for the less demanding Italo-horror viewer, and is worth a look on a slow night, perhaps on a double bill with *Baywatch: Hawaiian Wedding*.

Chris Alexander

And after sitting through countless aneurysm-inducing rock videos and Playstation games masquerading as horror films, an old-fashioned flick like *House of the Damned* can feel like a minor masterpiece – which it certainly isn't.

The movie is more than just the sum of its negatives, though. Despite a mystery subplot that any ten-year-old will figure out by the end of the second reel, a haunted house that isn't very haunted and no real scares, *House of the Damned* still manages to hold the eyes for the duration of its 63 minutes. The real attraction of the film is its creepy setting, a garish neo-Spanish Hollywood mansion in the foggy foothills of Malibu that director Maury Dexter makes the most of in almost every scene.

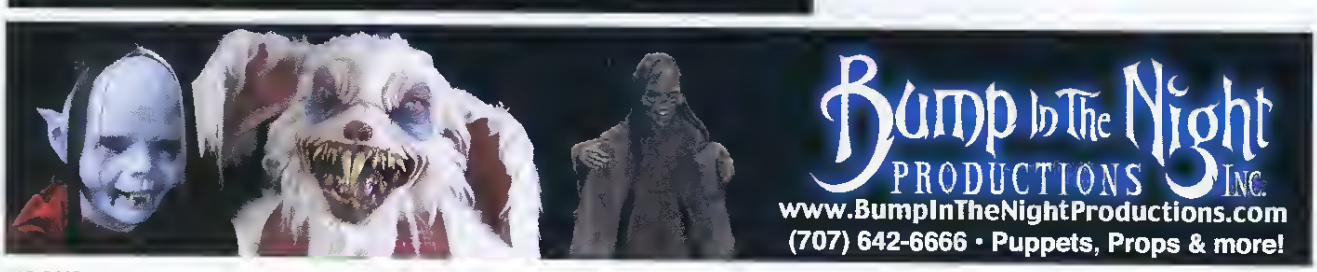
The plot, such as it is, concerns Scotty, a struggling architect asked to survey Rochester Castle, the aforementioned mansion, built by an eccentric heiress early in the 20th century. The mansion's most recent tenant, a retired circus owner who rented the place for many years, has mysteriously disappeared, leaving the heiress' descendants with an empty rental property in the middle of nowhere.



With the back story dispatched in the first ten minutes, Scotty and his wife (who bear an uncanny resemblance to a pre-Beaver June and Ward Cleaver) set off for a romantic working weekend at the mansion, where they are to be joined by Scotty's lawyer friend and his hoochie coochie wife. Things get creepy on the first night when a legless man – or is it a legless ghost? – makes off with two of the house's thirteen keys. From there, the film builds its house-as-evil-entity atmosphere – using some great camera work and set design – until a bokey conclusion wraps the proceedings far too quickly and smoothly.

House of the Damned borrows freely from superior haunted house films like *The Haunting* and *House on Haunted Hill*, and there are more than a few nods to Tod Browning's *Freaks*, but for all its derivativeness, this interesting curio deserves a viewing.

James Grainger



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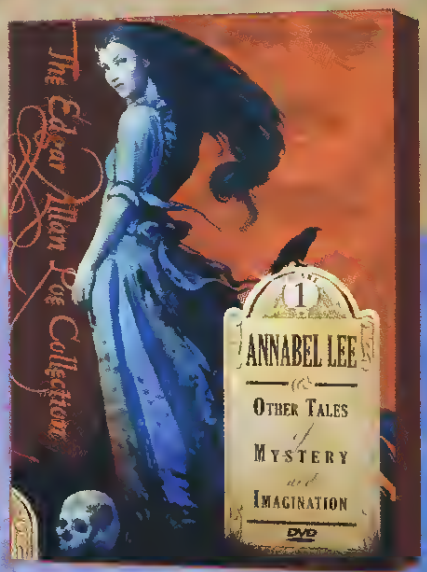
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***DAUGHTERS OF DARKNESS*, HARRY KÜMEL'S OPUS OF HALLUCINOGENIC ART HOUSE SENSUALITY, CELEBRATES 35 YEARS OF SUMPTUOUS VAMPIRISM.**

Bathory's Blood Lust



BY CHRIS ALEXANDER

Even the most celebrated exploitation films are designed to pander, patrolling the depths of base human impulses with garish, PT Barnum-esque aplomb. But when a group of Belgian softcore porn producers commissioned risque art house director and film school professor Harry Kümel to make a sex-soaked slice of trashy exploitation, they got infinitely more than they bargained for. They got *Daughters of Darkness* (*Les Levres Rouges*), one of the most sensual, intelligent and amusingly perverse horror films in the annals of vampire cinema.

Now, Blue Underground gives it the royal treatment with a comprehensive double-disc, High-Definition release complete with commentaries, cast interviews and promotional material. Kümel's sophisticated 1971 meditation on all things carnal and corporeal riffs on the legend of real-life 17th century "bloody countess" Elizabeth Bathory, a Hungarian noblewoman said to have slaughtered scores of virgins and bathed in their blood. Originally pitched as an expensive period piece, the moneymen behind the film scoffed at the price tag, forcing Kümel to rethink his approach.

"I originally dreamed of doing something classic, along the lines of vintage Mario Bava," says Kümel over the phone from New York, "but because of the lower budget I instead made it modern with Bathory now a kind of vampire, still roaming the world looking for virgins. I wrote a treatment with tons of sex scenes and I was told to make an exploitation picture – but my way, in *my* style."

And an incredible style it is. *Daughters of Darkness* has young newlyweds Valerie (Quebecois sex star Danielle Ouimet) and Stefan (*Dark Shadows*' John Karlen) stranded in a shockingly beautiful off-season beachfront hotel. Enter Bathory, a charming but lethal lesbian blood-sucker who almost immediately seduces and dismantles the young couple while also exposing the menace that hides deep within the male/female dynamic.

In other hands this scenario might turn into an overripe exercise in blood-splattered T&A, but while *Daughters* has those in spades, Kümel's prowling camera work, sophisticated sense of character, distinctly European sensibilities, underlying black humour and lush, red-centric palette elevates it far above a cheesecake frightfest.



At the centre of it all is Bathory herself, played by the devastating, late legendary French actress Delphine Seyrig.

"My only condition to actually do *Daughters of Darkness* was that I get Delphine to play Elizabeth," Kümel reveals. "My colleagues said that she would never do it; I mean she had worked with Alain Resnais and Truffaut. But she adored the script and signed on immediately. There really was no one like her. She was an intellectual, a champagne socialist and the kind of actor that you want to repeat a scene just to watch her work."

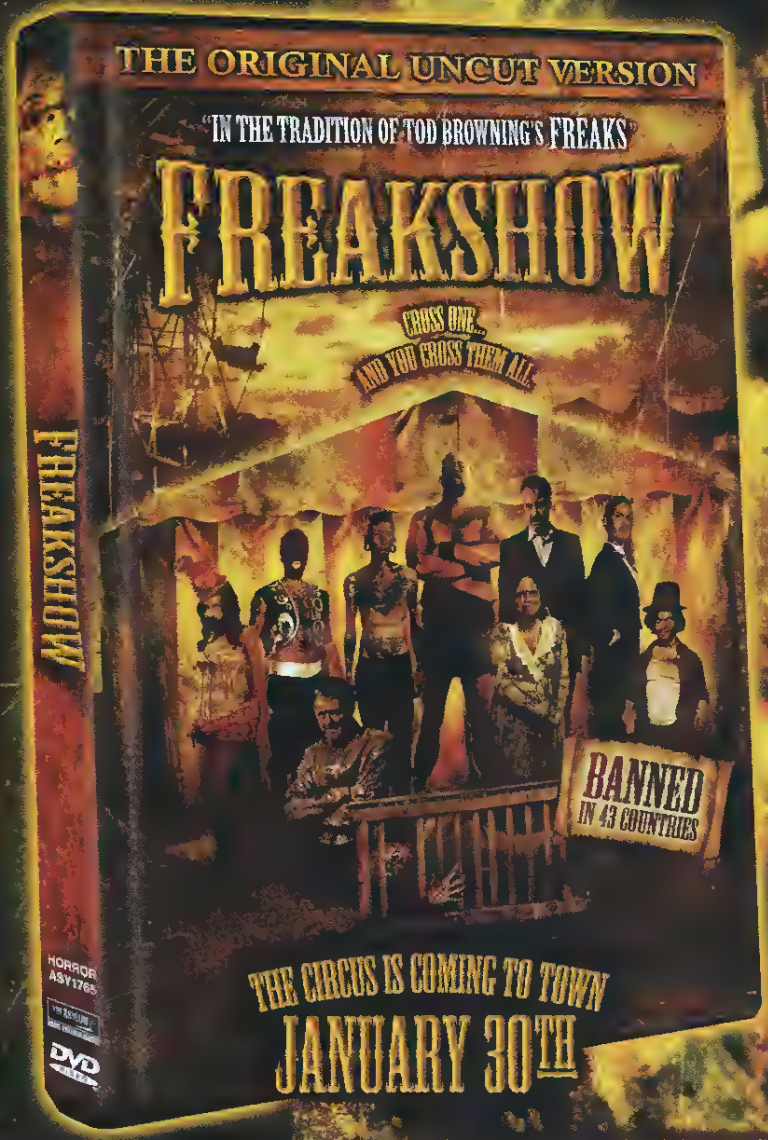
Seyrig is breathtaking to watch onscreen, yet she is matched by her co-stars, including luscious German porn starlet (and Louise Brooks look-alike) Andrea Rau as Bathory's companion, the lanky Duimet, who brings a gangly sexuality and innocence to her role as the put-upon bride, and Karlen as the increasingly abusive and insatiable husband who lives in fear of his mother. In one of the film's weirdest touches, we learn that "mother" is in fact a man, played by fantastic character actor Fons Rademakers (*Lifespan*).

"The addition of Fons as 'Mother' was a last minute one, intended as a joke," admits Kümel. "I had no intention to imply anything other than a darkly humorous way to reveal that Stefan was a closeted homosexual. But it's true that this was used to sell the film in the English markets. I believe the tagline was, 'If you think these girls are wild… wait until you get a load of Mother!' It was very funny."

Ultimately, however, *Daughters of Darkness* is a minor masterpiece of erotic horror that serves as an extension of Kümel's unique cinematic aesthetic – his firm belief in accentuating style over substance.

"I never care about the subject, I only care about how you present it, how you tell the story," he proclaims. "Cinema is a dream, it is an artifice, a glimpse into another world and it should always be controlled by the director. I often show Orson Welles' version of *Macbeth* to my students because, though it has obviously cardboard sets, it's so stylized. I detest naturalism in cinema and because of this I would never show my class Polanski's *Macbeth*. Ugh. I vomit on that piece of naturalist shit!"

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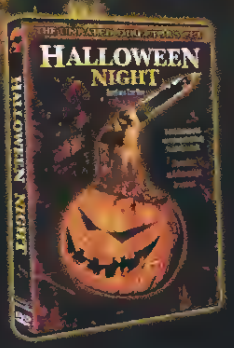
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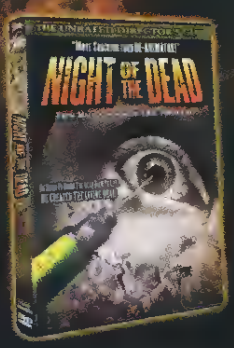
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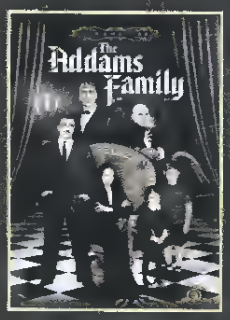
THEY'RE CREEPY AND THEY'RE KOOKY.
MYSTERIOUS AND SPOOKY.
THEY'RE ALTOGETHER OOKEY.
THE ADDAMS FAMILY... ON DVD!

YOU RANG?



by LAST CHANCE LANCE

It's been more than 40 years since a hilariously morbid show featuring an ensemble of eccentric misanthropes first made its TV debut. *The Addams Family*, based on the cartoons of the late Charles Addams, introduced the world to Lurch, Thing and Cousin Itt – not to mention the word "ookey." And though it only ran for two seasons, its legacy creeps on in DVD format with MGM's *The Addams Family: Volume One* – the first 22-episode chunk of its 64-episode run.



Conceived as a "scary" sitcom, the show relied heavily on the nonconformist Old World charm of a Gothic family stuck in middle-class American suburbia.

John Astin took on the role of Gomez, playing an oddball raconteur lawyer with gusto reminiscent of Groucho Marx. Hollywood heartthrob Carolyn Jones assumed the role of his wife Morticia and brought smouldering sex appeal to the show as she skittered about in skin-tight vampiric gowns, inspiring goth girls for decades to come. Along with their children Pugsley (Ken Weatherwax) and Wednesday (Lisa Loring), Uncle Fester (Jackie Coogan), Cousin Itt (Felix Silla), and their butler Lurch (Ted Cassidy, who made famous the line "You rang?"), the family interacted with mainstream society and triumphed over the prejudices imposed upon them.

Hijinks on the DVD set includes the family seeking therapy for Pugsley after he joins the Boy Scouts and replaces his pet octopus with a puppy, both kids being pulled out of school when Gomez and Morticia learn they're being taught fairy tales where witches are – gasp! – burned in ovens, and even an episode where the CIA mistakes the family's ghoulish activities for pro-communist behaviour. Yes, the Addams es were mysterious and spooky but at the same time they were one of the most passionate, optimistic and well-adjusted families on TV.

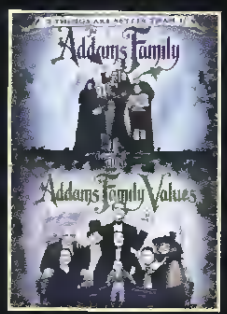
The 1960s show stands the test of time, and is given its due on this three-disc set. A few of the episodes have commentaries from Loring, Weatherwax and Silla (Cousin Itt), reminiscing about what it was like to grow up on the set and work with special guest stars like Don Rickles and Alan Reed (the voice of Fred Flintstone). There are also interesting behind-the-scenes interviews, a theme song karaoke spot and a wonderful featurette detailing the life of Charles Addams. Creepy, kooky and long overdue. ☠

The Addams Family

Although *The Addams Family* spawned a line of action figures, lunchboxes, colouring and comic books, and even a Saturday morning cartoon, it wasn't until 1991 that the family finally made the leap to the big screen (recently re-released on DVD from Paramount).

The success or failure of the movie would depend upon the casting of the main characters, and it's here that the producers really came through, as they assembled a first-rate cast: Raul Julia as Gomez, perfectly matching Astin's zany wit and comic flair; Anjelica Huston, rivalling Jones' alabaster beauty as Morticia; Christopher Lloyd in a standout performance as Uncle Fester; and an eleven-year-old Christina Ricci as the wantonly depressing Wednesday.

The straightforward plot has Fester reappearing after a mysterious 25-year absence. Suffering from amnesia, he returns to the Addams fold and unknowingly aides a couple of con artists in their plot to steal the family fortune. Director Barry Sonnenfeld fills his respectful homage with clever dialogue, fantastic sets and ghoulishly good humour.



Packaged with the film is the 1993 sequel *Addams Family Values*, which reunited the entire cast – with the exception Grandmama, now played by Carol Kane – and added a baby boy named Pubert.

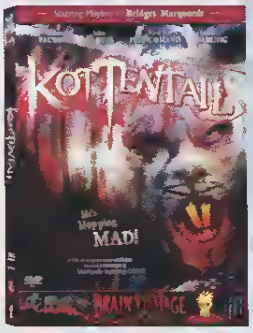
Unfortunately, this bare-bones reissue is nothing to scream about and the only extras are a couple of original theatrical trailers. It's a fun romp to watch both movies back to back but fans will cringe at the bastardization of the original Vic Mizzy score by MC Hammer and Tag Team. Neat, sweet, cheap – snap snap! ☠

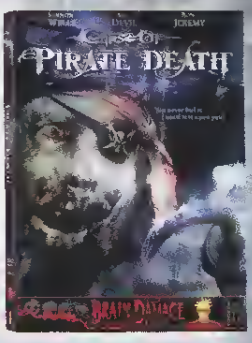
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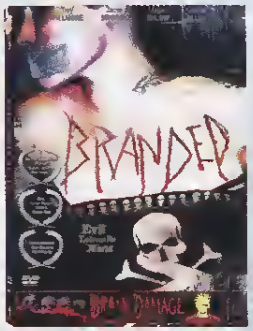


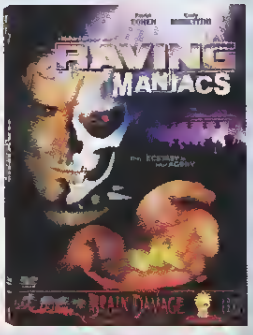


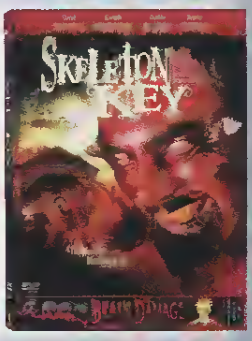






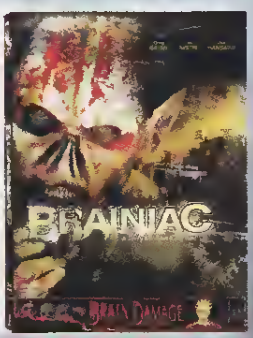


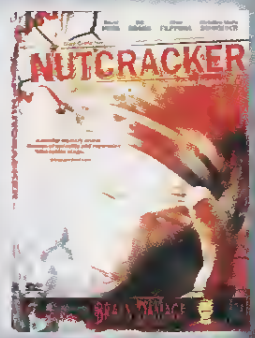


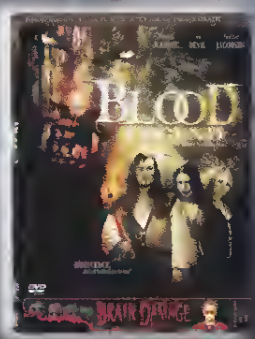


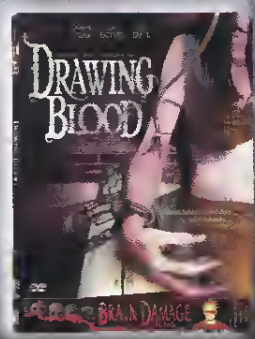




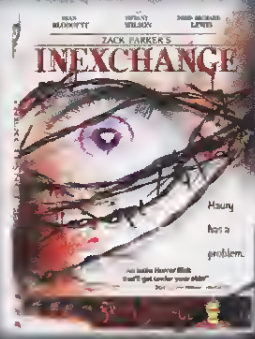












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EL VAMPIRO (1957)
EL ATAÚD DEL VAMPIRO (1958)

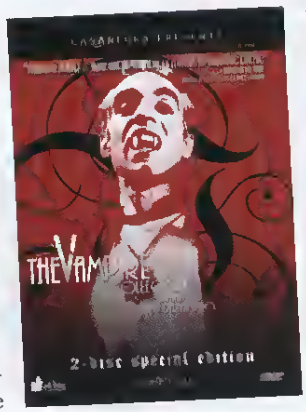
Directed by Fernando Méndez
Written by Ramón Dbón and Raúl Zenteno
Starring Abel Salazar, Germán Robles and Ariadne Welter
CasaNegra Films



The Vampire Collection: *Germán Robles as Count de Lavud, Mexico's take on Dracula*

The black-caped, sabre-toothed seducer leering out from the cover of this DVD may be the epitome of vampire cliché nowadays, but when Spaniard Germán Rohles first donned those fake fangs in the late-'50s for a pair of Mexican vampire films, it was shocking. In a time when many vampire kisses were censored with cutaways, Rohle's extra-elongated canines were his most prominent feature, making him a prototype for gorier vamps to come (blood-drenched teeth would soon feature prominently in Hammer horror, for example).

In fact, Robles' performances were quite a bite more vicious than his peers at the time, so why haven't we heard more of him and his version of *Nosferatu*? Why hasn't Mexican black and white horror received the special-edition treatment so lovingly showered upon (seemingly) every long-lost classic from Europe?



It matters no longer since Casa Negra has packaged two excellent features from Mexico's golden age of horror together for its new Vampire Collection. Under the direction of Fernando Méndez, both *El Vampiro* and *El Ataúd del Vampiro* are gorgeous Gothic chillers dripping with shadows, sex appeal and sinister plot twists.

Mexico's horror industry didn't get rolling until the 1950s, but was influenced more by twenty-year-old Universal classics than the low-budget B-movie schlock of the day. According to this set's bonus photo essay "Fear á la Mexicana," Méndez was at the forefront, having shifted from directing comedies and westerns to fantasy in 1953 with the sci-fi thriller *Ladron de Cadaveres* (*Body Thief*), in which a mad scientist turns a wrestler into a gorilla (!). This influential work inspired producer/actor Abel Salazar to enlist him for a big-budget vampire movie he described as "Dracula on a hacienda."

El Vampiro (*The Vampire*) begins with a familiar set-up: an innocent traveller in a remote area finds the locals unwilling to provide passage after sundown – apparently, rumours of vampires have them spooked. But this is far from another foreign rehash of Stoker. While the first, and most well-known, Mexican version of *Dracula* was a faithful recreation of the Lugosi classic (shot simultaneously using the same sets), this one is 100 percent *hecho en Mexico*.

The plot is rote: pretty l'il Marta Gonzalez (Ariadne Welter), and her suitor Dr. Enrique (Abel Salazar) find themselves in the midst of a plot by Rohles' Count de Lavud to take control of the town of Sierra Negra, which has been terrorized by a string of bloody murders. Why no one (including the supposed hero/expert, Enrique) suspects the dude in the cape who imports soil from Hungary is the greatest puzzle here, although a subplot surrounding the death, and subsequent reappearance of, crazy old aunt Maria Teresa (Alicia Montoya) offers some mystery. In addition, Carmen Montejo as Eloisa, the malevolent matriarch in black, gives a standout performance.

It's not the story that makes *El Vampiro* special, however, it's the atmospheric cinematography (Rosalio Sonato) and art direction (Gunther Gerson) that make each scene a dark delight. From fog-drenched funeral processions to Lavud's attack on a peasant boy (without cutaway, quite unheard of at the time), the film is beautiful enough to enjoy with the sound off. It's not a perfect movie by any means – Lavud's powers are limited, his transformation into a bat is goofy and the final showdown features a bizarre sword fight – but *El Vampiro* deserves its title as Mexico's best vampire film.

Its sequel, *El Ataud del Vampiro* (*The Vampire's Coffin*), transplants the main cast to the city, where everything intensifies: Lavud is more menacing and grandiose, comedic elements are exaggerated, and scenes in a wax museum deliver supreme creeps (an iron maiden is used to particularly great effect). Like a crime thriller with a supernatural twist, *El Ataud del Vampiro* is a less conventional vampire picture but equally compelling.

Gracias a Casa Negro, these are wonderfully presented in Spanish with English subtitles (far superior to previously dubbed versions) and packaged with detailed audio commentary from a Mexican monster buff, archival radio spots, photos and a way cool horror-themed Loteria game card. This double-disc is a must-have for vampire film collectors.

Liisa Ladouceur

WARNING: THESE FILMS CONTAINS GRAPHIC VIOLENCE! You have been warned!

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"Though flawed and unevenly paced, C.H.U.D. is still a smart and scary oddball gem that has weaved its way into the collective pop culture psyche."

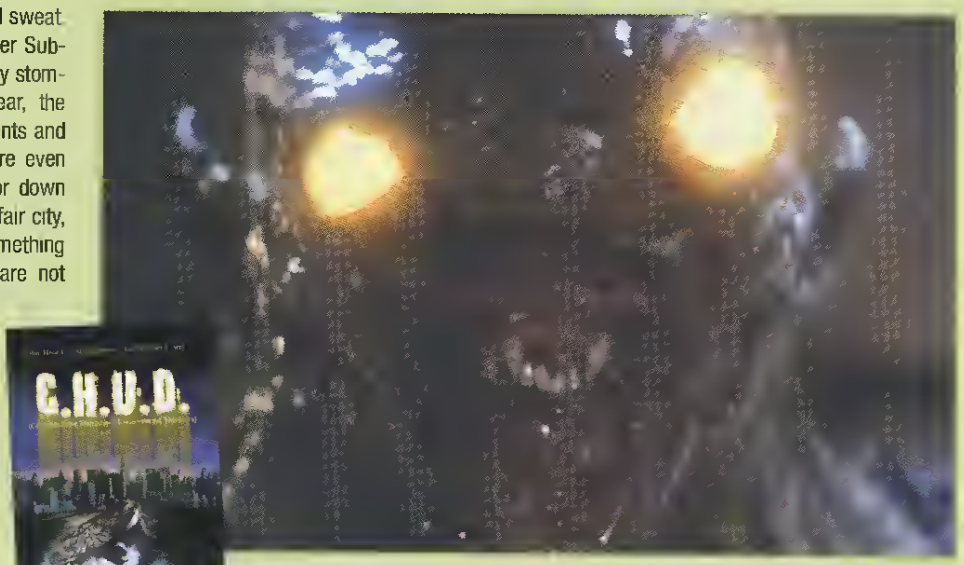
The Mad Musings of a Schizoid Cinephile



by Chris Alexander

Every time I pass a sewer grate, I sweat. When I step on a manhole, I shiver. Subway tunnels make me sick to my stomach. It's the underground I fear, the secret world beneath my feet – basements and sub-basements, parts of the dark where even the most badass rat dare not tread. For down there, deep in the greasy bowels of my fair city, lies a horror worse than death itself, something so hideous and blood-chilling that I dare not write its name.

But if I *don't* write its name, then this here column will end before it begins. So let it be known that the subterranean evil I fear is full of flesh-eating fury. Let it be known that the name of true blue terror starts with a "C," ends with a "D" and sports a dreadful "HU" as the meat in between. Put your head on my chest and let me hold you tight while I whisper the word... "C H U D.!"



Yes, C.H.U.D., a.k.a. Cannibalistic Humanoid Underground Dwellers lean, mean, red-eyed, razor-toothed mutant hobo-killing machines and the subject of Douglas Cheek's immortal, socially aware 1984 cult horror classic of the same name.

Here's the skinny: seems something grey, slimy and hungry has been slaughtering the night-crawling citizens of New York's Lower East Side, and the wife of hard-boiled Detective Bosch (Christopher Curry) might be one of them. Joining forces with an eccentric soup kitchen manager (a dynamic Daniel Stern) whose destitute clientele are also going the way of the dinosaur, Bosch uncovers a corporate toxic waste dumping operation that is apparently turning the tunnel-dwelling transients into hulking cannibal mutants. Meanwhile, a macho fashion photographer (John Heard), who has been using the city's homeless as subjects in his bid to become a more serious shutterbug, also notices that his mangy models are deep-sixing at an alarming rate. These three intrepid desperadoes will eventually meet up in NYC's grimiest sewers, coming face-to-fang with growling, drooling C.H.U.D.s which, as the infamous ad campaign screamed, are " . not staying down there anymore!"

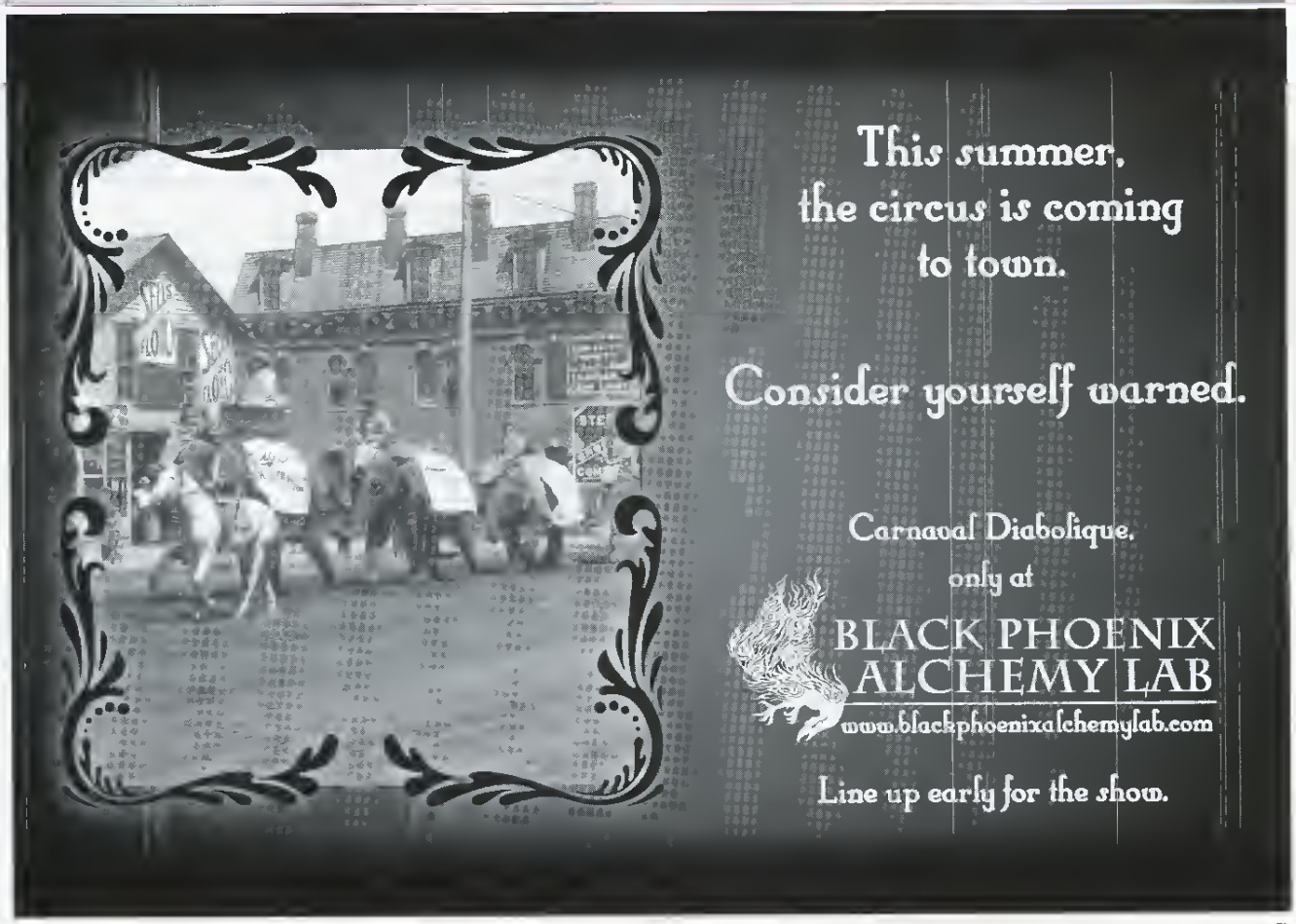
Though flawed and unevenly paced, *C.H.U.D.* is still a smart and scary oddball gem that has weaved its way into the collective pop culture psyche (even *The Simpsons* gave it a nod some years back). The creature effects by John Caglione Jr. and Doug Drexler (*The Blob* remake, *Poltergeist III*) are oft-ridiculed but are still, to me anyway, startling feats of slimy, sinewy genius. The score, courtesy David A. Hughes (*Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*), is fucking terrifying, with its doom-laden synth and pulsing electro chorus – especially good during the film's coronary-inducing underground climax. And William Bilowit's filthy urban decay production design makes you want to wash your eyeballs.

The film's tongue is placed firmly in cheek, and it has a pleasant mainstream-gone-slummy aura, thanks to the presence of Stern, who was fresh off the success of *Diner*, and Heard, seen prior to that in Paul Schrader's *Cat People*. (Apparently they did it as a favour to writer Hall and still haven't been paid for it!)

I recall watching *C.H.U.D.* on TV years ago and noting that the ending from the old Media VHS tape I was used to (featuring a pre-*Roseanne* John Goodman as a cannibalized cop) was placed in the middle of the picture, giving the film a more optimistic denouement. The version released on DVD by Anchor Bay in 2002 is actually the full director's cut, which retains the TV print's structure and adds almost ten minutes of amazing new footage, including an entire subplot with Detective Bosch that milks previously unfelt pathos for the character.

And please, don't let the film's many naysayers sway you from experiencing and adoring *C.H.U.D.* *Leonard Maltin's Movie Guide* has long awarded it with a shameful "BDMB" rating, accusing the movie of being "grimy on all levels." No SHIT, Lenny! That's why I like it! Alexander out.


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BY GARY BUTLER

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IN THIS ISSUE!

LOST GIRLS
by Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie *Top Shelf*

AGNES QUILL: AN ANTHOLOGY OF MYSTERY
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CTHULHU TALES: THE RISING
by various writers/artists *BOOM!*

DR. STRANGE VS. DRACULA: THE MONTESI FORMULA
by various writers/artists *Marvel*

GRAPHIC CLASSICS: H.P. LOVECRAFT (2ND EDITION)
adapted by Tom Pomplun *Graphic Classics*

THE PIRATES OF CONEY ISLAND #3 (OF 8)
by Rick Spears and Vasilis Lolos *Image*

PLEASE RELEASE
by Nate Powell *Top Shelf*

"Sex is like being plunged into a strange wonderland with its own laws, full of strange creatures alternately wonderful and scary," offers comic legend Alan Moore, who then proceeds to do what he does best: effect the unimaginable. In this case, he finds a way to discuss his newest book, *Lost Girls*, entirely within the confines of horror, despite it not technically belonging to the genre.

Released in the US last September and available north of the border since December (following protracted negotiations with Canada Customs), *Lost Girls* is first and foremost a contentious work of pornography. Rightly so; in fact, Moore insists on applying the shady term – hopefully redeeming it in the process.

"The idea," he says, "was to create a work of pornography with all of the artistic and literary depth one expects from a 'reputable' piece of art. If horror can do that, if superhero comics can do that – and they can – then so too should pornography be able to."

Horror rears its shocking head primarily on a psychological level in *Lost Girls*, in which the chance encounter of grown-up versions of three of literature's most famous female protagonists – Dorothy Gale (*The Wizard of Oz*), Alice Fairchild (*Alice in Wonderland*) and Wendy Darling (*Peter Pan*) – results in the author's clever deconstruction, via storytelling-within-a-story, of their famous individual adventures. The psychological horror is rooted in Moore's bold and unflinching suggestion that each girl's fantasy is nothing short of a coping mechanism for underage sexual abuse.



"*Lost Girls* is not a horror story with sexual undertones – it's the reverse," he says. "Horror works on a visceral, subconscious level. Sex itself is not about fear, but fear is among its undercurrents."

We typically fear what we do not understand, to wit both horror and pornography, and Moore uses each to examine the other's notoriety.

"They are both of the world of fiction and there can be nothing done in the world of fiction that is not healthy in some way," he argues. "Exploring thoughts that are macabre – however you interpret the word – in a safe arena provides a healthy release and forum to discuss those very notions."

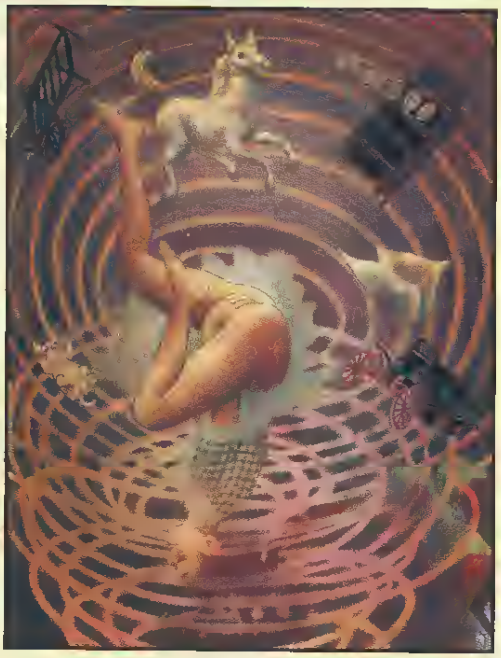
Children, of course, are the heart of *Lost Girls*, or if you prefer, the lost girls are children at heart. Their premature sexual awareness has led to lives of unhealthy denial and escapist fantasy. Moore is quick to defend the book as being "anything but exploitative," though he does understand that a capsule description might give the uninitiated the reverse impression.

"We didn't want to do smutty parodies, we wanted to extrapolate the lives the girls might have had. We were very protective of them; we wanted no situations whatsoever that degraded them in traditional senses."

This is not to suggest that the grown-up lost girls are leading happy lives; at the time of their encounter, the opposite is in effect. Alice has descended into a hellish, drug-addled, sexual underworld (as Moore says, "not a wonderland, but an *underland*"). By contrast, Wendy has repressed her libido entirely in a passionless marriage of convenience.

Artist Melinda Gebbie's soft pastel illustrations betray the innocence buried beneath each girl's damaged psyche.

"We make every effort to show that psychological breakdown," Moore says. "Two of the book's most horrific moments are silent, full-page companion images that we call the 'Jabbercock' and 'Pussygator,' which show the fantasy landscape going on in the protagonist's mind."



***Lost Girls'* Oz-bound Dorothy:** *The horror of orgasm and the orgasm of horror*

Go ahead and snicker – Moore understands that the words are indeed funny, and simultaneously shocking.

"They intentionally sum up each gender's worst and most ridiculous fears about the other," he allows. "In grotesque physical form, you can see how horrific they are, funny too. There is a largeness of symbols that's not literal, but clashes between men are cockfights – hence the 'Jabbercock,' Peter Pan vs. Captain Hook – who's the biggest? Replace the penises with chainsaws and you essentially have Freddy vs. Jason."

Could *Lost Girls* have been executed in a kinder, gentler manner? Not according to Moore.

"Life can't be compartmentalized into genres. It's messy, it can't be separated, it's all going on at once. If we are well-balanced, then horror, sexuality, comedy, heroism and villainy – we are all these things at once, and that's what makes us human."

QUICK CUTS

REVIEWS BY GARY BUTLER, ERIC GRANT AND MARK MOYES

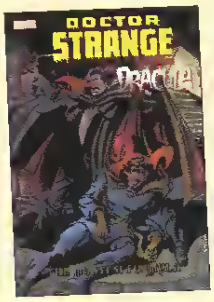


AGNES QUILL is more than just a filigreed Nancy Drew: she also has a sixth sense (yep, she sees dead people). Creator Dave Roman reanimates a tired subgenre – the teen detective story – by focussing on his plots rather than his gregarious, ghost-gazing goth girl (hey, it's SLG). Highlights include a cheating husband whose wife turns his paramours into zombie assassins (target: him) and a paralyzed man sawn in half by a magician only to find that his legs got up and ran away. Short samples available at realmsend.com. **GB**



A SEQUEL to BOOM!'s excellent 2005 anthology of Lovecraft-inspired shorts, *Cthulhu Tales: The Rising* keeps it comically cosmic. In the clever fact-based "The Art of Noises," a barfly explains why Mahler's 3rd Symphony is actually a tentacled beacon, and "For You" is entertainingly reminiscent of *The Twilight Zone*'s "To Serve Man." The hands-down highlight, though, is Hans Rodionoff's "Pull of Insanity," which resets "The Thing at the Doorstep" in, of all places for lurking horror, a comic book store, the "pull" being a pre-ordered copy of this very cool book. **GB**

HERE'S A NEAT IDEA: a faceoff between the master of the mystic arts and the lord of the undead – magic vs. the supernatural, Dr Strange vs. Dracula. Started in 1979 and finished in 1983, the collected "Montesi Formula" is a winner-takes-all story in the madcap Marvel manner: crazy-ass dialogue ("Vipers of Valtorr!"), body-busting cross-hatching (for the Gene Colan issues) and an absolutely offbeat back story (vampires are from... Atlantis?). It doesn't all work, but with both leads dying – whoops! – you sure can't call it predictable. **GB**



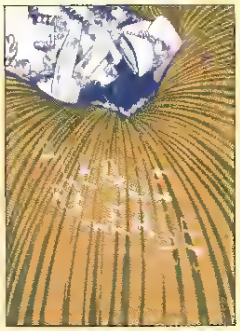
THE REVISED SECOND EDITION of *Graphic Classics: H.P. Lovecraft* (*RM#32*) includes 75 pages of new black and white material. Simon Gane's jumbled "Shadow over Innsmouth" cityscapes and Pedro Lopez's almost-empty trans-dimensional "Dreams in the Witch House" realms bring shape to Lovecraft's abstract descriptions without crushing his prose with too much realism or detail. The effect is deceptively creepy. Lovecraft's non-supernatural satire "Sweet Ermengarde" is an odd-ball inclusion, but in setting the story as a stage play being watched by suitably batrachian stagehands and audience, writer Rod Lott and illustrator Kevin Atkinson give the romantic farce's atmosphere some suitable (re)animation. **EG**



WHEN YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT a carjacking on a New York freeway, statements like "prepare to be boarded" and "walk the plank" become raucously dangerous. Expect no less from *The Pirates of Coney Island*, which has miscreant teens bringing a fresh twist to the concept of "children of the night." In fact, one of them is dead and doesn't know it yet. Horror is also encroaching in the form of a demonic hitman who drives a "Cadillacula" (awesome). Kudos to colourist Nick Filardi's vibrant palette – heavy on the pinks, purples and, cha-ching, crimsons. **GB**



NATE POWELL'S *Please Release* ain't a horror book, unless you consider Sartre frightening. But the autobiographical anthology's second story, "The Old Haunts," uses the paranoia you get after watching a horror flick to explore restless, middle-of-the-night, existential angst. "And what a blow that the horror reveals to us – we are the only demons." Heady stuff, but it rings true, more so due to the appropriately crisp pencils. Just the thing for slasher fans needing to scratch that philosophical itch. **MM**



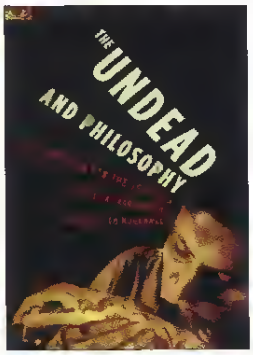


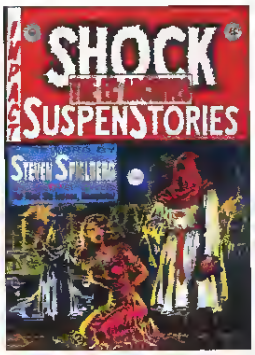


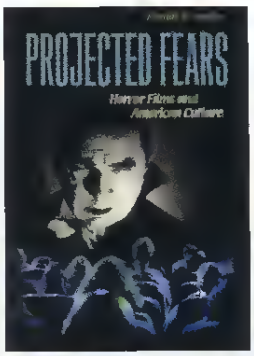

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The Undead and Philosophy: chicken soup for the soulless

Richard Greene and K. Silem Mohammad, eds.
Open Court Publishing

The not-so-hidden social commentary lurking in Romero's zombie films has been discussed to undeath by fans and critics alike, but few have thought to ask what Aristotle would make of our modern fixation with brain-eating, bloodsucking freaks. Presumably, anyone who does ponder such questions has contributed to this collection of essays, the latest in a series of books combining popular culture and philosophy (other volumes dissect *The Matrix*, *Lord of the Rings* and *Star Wars*).

In the book, a lively assortment of professors tackle whether or not it truly sucks to be undead. Each has a deep understanding of the horror genre and, while dropping references to both high and lowbrow films and lit, writes in a style that's as entertaining as it is thought provoking.

Co-editor Richard Greene starts by questioning why being a zombie or vampire is regarded as a state worse than death. (Hint: "A state is comparatively bad when it has less total goodness than some other state one might find oneself in.") Hamish Thompson, in "She's Not Your Mother Anymore, She's a Zombie!," asks why we have so few qualms about killing the mindless undead and what obligations we have to the bodies of loved ones ("If your spouse is zombified, should you divorce him or her?"). If these topics seem flippant, consider that they touch on some of the most timeless debates about morality and justice. For instance, pondering whether someone lacking cognitive sophistication should be held accountable for their bloodthirsty acts applies to underage murderers and vampires alike.

And if that seems like too many questions, remember that, unlike art critics or radio talk show hosts, philosophers exist not to pass blustery judgement, but to throw crazy ideas out there. The best chapters turn things over to the classic thinkers. Matthew Walker goes deep into Aristotle's writings on *pleonexia* (the excessive desire for consumption) to dissect *Dawn of the Dead*, while Phillip Cole reveals that Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote about vampires and the politics of fear in the 18th century.

Reading *The Undead and Philosophy* is like a crash course in ethics and a feisty argument with (really smart) genre fans all in one. For its fresh, fun take on the study of horror, it gets an A+.

Liisa Ladouceur

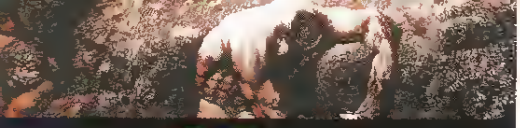
The EC Archives: shock suspenstories volume 1

Al Feldstein, Jack Kamen, Graham Ingels, et al.
Gemstone Publishing

From *Tales from the Crypt* to *The Haunt of Fear*, maverick "funnybook" publisher EC dished out some of the goriest comics of the 1950s, complete with bombshell twist endings that would have made O. Henry do a double take. First collected in black and white as *The Complete EC Library* in the early 1970s, *The EC Archives* is a brand new series of hardbound reprints that gives the groundbreaking comics a bold and bloody colour revamp.

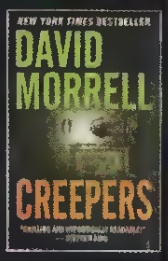
Following on the retro-rocket fumes of October's *Weird Science Volume 1*, *EC Archive: Shock SuspenStories Volume 1* collects the first six re-coloured issues of the grab-bag publication, adding an introduction by Steven Spielberg. Conceived as a genre-spanning anthology combining a crime, science fiction, horror and war tale in the same magazine, *Shock SuspenStories* features tightly written narratives with a strong focus on revenge, murder and dismemberment. Whether it's a hunter who desperately wants a bearskin rug for his den, or a shady space captain who lets his crew die to save extra oxygen for himself, you can bet that the arrogant and the criminal will get their richly deserved comeuppance in the final panel – illustrated in audaciously grisly fashion by core EC artists Feldstein, Ingels, Kamen, Jack Davis and Wally Wood.

Two issues in, EC decided to differentiate *Shock SuspenStories* from the rest of their lineup by replacing the war story with a socially relevant thriller that would allow them to lash out at racism, injustice, and Cold War conformity. Included in this volume are some of their better efforts, including "Hate," a classic tale about a violent anti-



The Grim Reader

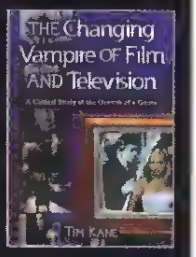
CREEPERS
David Morrell
CDS Books



Best known as the Canadian who created *Rambo*, thrillmeister David Morrell imagines a situation most would never want to find themselves in, then plays it out to the (very) graphic end in teeth-gritting real time. With plot elements that include urban exploration in a derelict New Jersey hotel, misdirection and mutants, this page-turner is well worth your hardback bucks.

Gemma Files

THE CHANGING VAMPIRE OF FILM AND TELEVISION
Tim Kane
McFarland & Company



Horror film buff Tim Kane examines the syntax and semantics of onscreen vamps through their evolution from malignant to erotic to sympathetic. But he should have looked at their style: his matter-of-fact undergraduate prose offers no delight or insight, except perhaps how to get a book deal out of your thesis by putting Buffy on the cover. Avoid like garlic.

Liisa Ladouceur

THE TENANT
Roland Topor
Millipede Press



The Tenant, adapted by Roman Polanski for his brilliant 1976 film, drips with that particularly French loathing of all things bourgeois and conformist, taking urban paranoia – and the horrors of apartment rental – to hilarious and grotesque heights. This beautiful edition features an excellent introductory essay by Thomas Ligotti as well as a selection of Roland Topor's absurdist line drawings and very short stories.

James Grainger



Shock SuspenStories Vol. 1: *A panel from Jack Kamen's "Split Second."*

Semite who gets a taste of his own brutal medicine, and "The Patriots," which skewers the same McCarthy-era commie hysteria that put Gaines out of the horror comic biz for good just a few years later.

While long-time fans will no doubt appreciate the work that has gone into these definitive editions, *Shock SuspenStories*' cross-genre approach also makes this volume the perfect introduction for newcomers. Either way, *The EC Archives* is the best way to enjoy the most influential and gripping series of horror comics ever devised.

Paul Corupe

projected fears
Kendall R. Phillips
Praeger Publishers

Genrephiles can be fiercely territorial, a characteristic that rears its head whenever "outsiders" (be they academics or mainstream critics) come 'round to offer their often passionless views on the genre's cherished works.

Good thing, then, that Kendall R. Phillips, author of *Projected Fears*, is not only an academic but a fan. Armed with a balance of reverence and intellect, he offers a rundown on ten horror films he considers the most influential on American culture. Though the titles are bound to summon yawns from the hardcore sect – *Dracula*, *Psycho*, *The Silence of the Lambs*, etc. – the reasoning behind making these selections is that Phillips is attempting to explain how the socio-cultural milieu of the time was key to both the films' creation and their widespread success, as well as how these movies went on to become part of the cultural tapestry.

The mixture of broad historical examination and in-depth study makes *Projected Fears* an interesting read, but there is something unsatisfying about it. Despite his ambitions, Phillips ultimately leads readers back to well-worn theories about why people are drawn to the genre – it helps us cope with "real" societal fears, addresses repressed desires and emotions, and so forth. Novices might be fascinated by some of his speculations, but reading about how Uncle Sam's fear of communism was a major component of Howard Hawks' *The Thing from Another World* will come off as blatantly obvious to long-time devotees.

Fortunately, Phillips also delves into the various films' subtexts and imagery, providing particularly intriguing dissections of the apocalyptic symbolism in *TCM* and *The Exorcist*.

Projected Fears ultimately begs the question, can horror – a genre that is inherently subversive, cathartic and unflinching in its explorations of taboo – even be defined by the culture it is striving to lash out against? Horror is an emotion, not an idea, and for all its universality, it's also intensely personal.





Ninth Circle Presents

Author JEMIAH JEFFERSON is on a crusade to put the fangs back into vampire fiction.

The Lady and the VAMPS

by Monica S. Kuebler

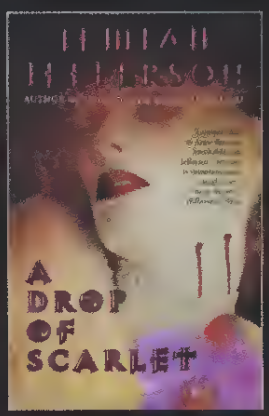
Literary vampire tales nearly were bled dry in the 1990s by the sheer abundance of releases from big name scribes such as Anne Rice and Poppy Z. Brite. But even though zombies have now taken over as the genre's undead poster children, the bloodthirsty still walk, hunt and make for compelling horror fiction. Just ask Jemiah Jefferson, who has carved out her own vampire niche with gnsly character-driven novels.



Like Rice, whose work Jefferson's is most often compared to, the Portland, Oregon-based author – who has a BA in English and wrote her first novel-length story at age twelve – tells her tales in serial format, each novel is set in the same universe, but focuses on a different character's conversion or destruction, allowing Jefferson to delve deeper into their lives and motivations. What results is a richly atmospheric world filled with terrifying three-dimensional characters who, unlike Rice's glamorous, seductive vamps, are more seriously flawed and have personalities that owe as much to their human victims as their literary forefathers.

"I was watching a lot of vampire-themed movies and reading books by Anne Rice and Poppy Z. Brite, and realized that as much as I liked these books and movies, they didn't quite say what I wanted to be said," says Jefferson of what drew her to the subgenre. "They didn't go quite far enough into making the inner lives of their characters explicit. I wanted sex scenes that didn't hold back; I wanted to explore destructive relationships and dangerous attractions, and the affermath of these kinds of all-too-common bad decisions."

Jefferson's latest full-length effort, *A Drop of Scarlet* (Leisure Books), continues the tale begun in the author's earlier books *Voice of the Blood* (2001), *Wounds* (2002) and *Fiend* (2005). The novel focuses on Ariane and John, a pair of relatively young vamps who have only been undead for a decade. Ariane is a scientist still working in the human world, feverishly searching for a cure for her lover's transformation-triggered insanity, but the one she finds, despite its effectiveness, is also a vampiric narcotic, which has the unwanted effect of attracting vamps from around the world who wish to experiment with its tantalizing, inhibition-dampening effects.



"'Human-ness' and flaws to me are sexy and far more lastingly beautiful than glamour and invincibility," explains Jefferson. "I'm not trying to have the human race destroy the vampire menace, and the vampires don't want to take over the world, either, generally speaking. Everyone's just trying to live their lives. That humanizing of the genre is something I don't see enough of, or I didn't used to, which is why I started writing [vampire fiction] – bringing a more intimate and emotional aspect to these incredibly dark, frightening, morally twisted lives."

Curbing the vampire's glamour, however, is not the only liberty that Jefferson has taken. Frustrated that many vampires seem so easy to repel or kill off – particularly through the use of religious implements – the author chose to make her vamps much more resilient, and while one might think this added hardiness would make for some exquisite gore, Jefferson uses the red stuff sparingly.

"Even in the life of a vampire, as I see it, that's only a very small part of an overall life," notes the author, whose broad range of literary influences include Voltaire, Lord Byron, Bram Stoker, Clive Barker, Irvine Welsh and sci-fi authors Brian Daley and Ian Fleming. "I love writing gore and violence, but a little of it goes a long way. I don't ever want to have a catalogue of atrocities that gets either boring or laughable … When something horrible happens in my books, I want it to be horrible, not the status quo."

Jefferson's novels take the form of tense genre dramas that occasionally erupt in glorious bucketloads of blood. A prime example of this plays out in *A Drop of Scarlet*, when a group of vamps in a drug-fuelled haze carjack a city bus and give a whole new meaning to eating on the go.

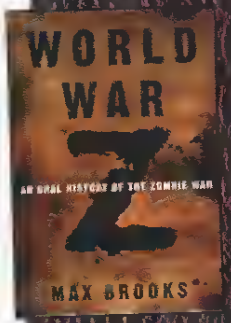
But why vampires, in a time when vampire fiction is considered all but passé?

"Vampires are sexy – they're close-range seducers, they're charismatic, they're tragic," explains Jefferson. "The concept of immortality – or at least expanded lifespans – is a really complex one, and it's a difficult question to ask oneself. Do I want to live forever? What would I do to continue that? Also, there's the fun of having enormous physical ability, along with a huge set of limitations. There are an infinite number of ways to reinterpret this legend."



world war z: an oral history of the zombie war

Max Brooks
Crown Publishing Group



Zombies! It's theme now so oversaturated in cinema and literature that it's practically busting at the Y-incision. With everyone and their brothers jumping on the meat wagon, fans of the subgenre are left to wonder if there are any original ideas left to harvest from the fly-blown fields of the reanimated dead. Well, wonder no longer, because Max Brooks offers one up with his new book *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War*.

In the not-too-distant future, a decade after the end of a war in which humanity barely survived the onslaught of an undead army, nations across the globe are still reeling from its apocalyptic effect. Author Brooks writes himself into the novel as its main character, a member of the United Nation's Post War Commission who decides that the UN's "after-action report" was too cold, regimental and lacking in the "human factor." So he decides to travel the world to get the stories first-hand from the people who lived through the zombie war, and in doing so, guard humanity from repeating its darkest days.

With *World War Z*, Brooks displays a growing maturity that was lacking in his campy freshman effort, *The Zombie Survival Guide*. Using an interview-style approach, he makes readers feel as if they are learning about events that actually occurred, thereby succeeding in thoroughly suspending disbelief. His blending of facts, footnotes and military jargon, along with brilliantly descriptive gore, reads like a collaboration between Tom Clancy and George Romero.

The trouble with "after the fact" books like *World War Z* is their anti-climactic nature, which comes from not having a big reveal or final payoff. Here, however, what you get instead is a sense of connection with the human condition, and that is a clever and refreshing departure from your typical zombie novel.

Ken Bonnie

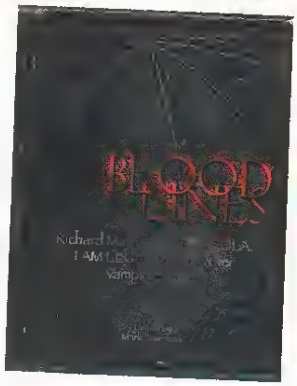
Perhaps this is why it manages to slither free from rational definition and definitive explanation. The very fact that horror cannot be easily defined may be part of its power and durability.

Richard Gavin

bloodlines

Richard Matheson
Gauntlet Press

If you truly adore Richard Matheson (*The Shrinking Man*, many key episodes of *The Twilight Zone*) and collect his works, then you most likely hold Gauntlet Press in the highest regard. They're the fine folks who have, over the past five years, released oodles of obscurities from the Dick Matheson vaults – everything from the *Kolchak* screenplays to the unrealized *Shrinking Man* sequel script – carefully scanned from the originals with Matheson's scratch-outs and typos included.



Continuing in this same vein is *Bloodlines* (edited by Mark Dawidziak), a king-size coffee-table tome that collects a chunk of Matheson's more sanguinarily inclined movie and literary scribblings, and features many treats for the elite admirer.

First off, we have Matheson's initial screen treatment for Bram Stoker's warhorse, *Dracula*, represented here in its rough draft form, with author corrections. His script streamlined the original novel but retained pivotal events and amplified the immortal Count's character. This treatment would eventually morph into the teleplay for Dan Curtis' excellent 1973 movie of the week starring Jack Palance. It was Matheson's lifelong obsession with Stoker's novel that inspired him to write his most famous piece of fiction, the towering and often imitated Gothic sci-fi vampire mood piece *I Am Legend*, which is also included in *Bloodlines* in its entirety. The author was later commissioned by Hammer Films to adapt *I Am Legend* for the screen – the result was a work deemed too intense for Hammer to produce. That screenplay, titled *Night Creatures*, has also been published here.

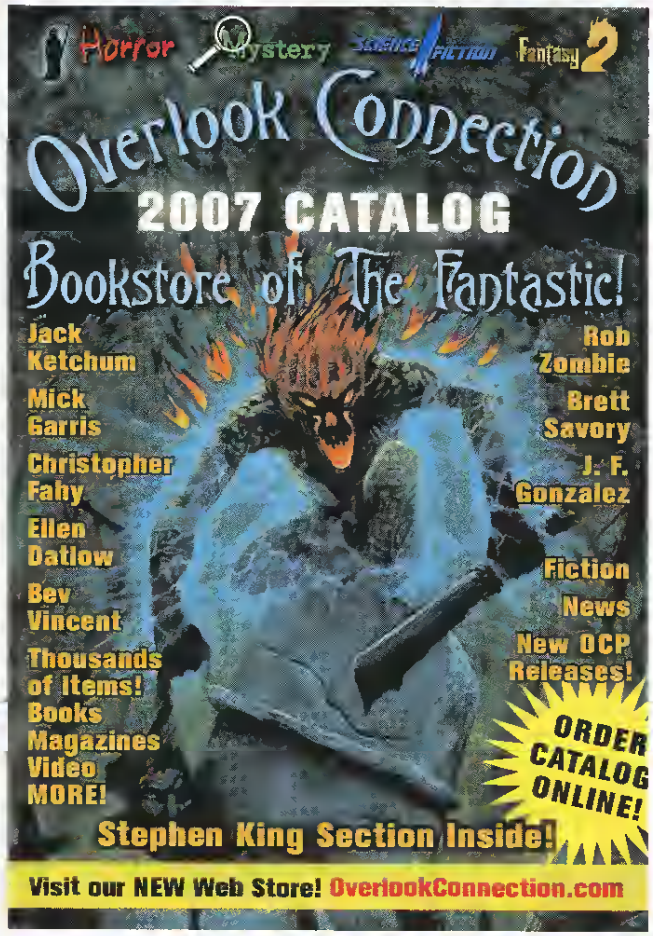
Gauntlet earns extra fanboy points for going several steps further, adding endless forewords and commentaries from the likes of Mick Garris, Steve Niles, Ray Bradbury and the author's son Richard Christian Matheson, plus a full photo gallery of film stills and rare paperback covers. *Bloodlines* is a welcome addition to Gauntlet's ever-expanding Matheson collection, brimming with essential material and fascinating curios.

Chris Alexander






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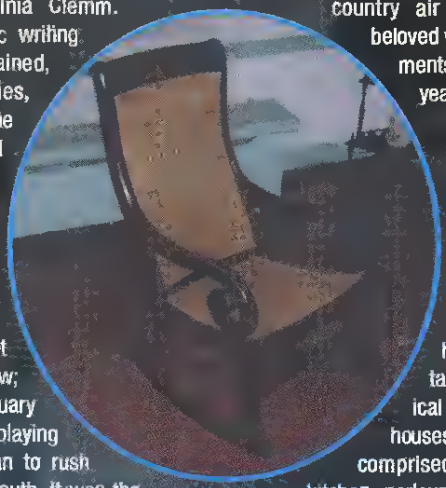
THE EDGAR ALLAN POE COTTAGE THE BRONX, NEW YORK

BY BRAD ABRAHAM

Tucked away in the bustling Fordham area of The Bronx is a modest cottage where one of the greatest human and literary dramas in horror history played out. It was here that a noted but struggling writer watched as his beloved wife succumbed to a lingering sickness whereupon a chain of events was set in motion that would lead to his own death and subsequent immortality in books, film and a certain magazine of some note.

New York was a city Edgar Allan Poe had lived in periodically from 1831 through 1849, as it was rapidly becoming the country's publishing capital, a designation it still holds today. Poe, unlike many writers, achieved a degree of fame in his own lifetime. However, that fame rarely translated into financial security and he found himself constantly struggling, which led to the frequent binge drinking that would cause so much torment later on.

Matters were complicated when, in 1835, at the age of 27, he secretly married his thirteen-year-old cousin Virginia Clemm. Entering into a prolific writing period that contained, among other stories, "Ligeia," "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym," Poe's work was well received critically, yet financial success continued to elude him. In 1842 fate dealt yet another crippling blow; on the evening of January 20, while singing and playing the piano, blood began to rush forth from Virginia's mouth. It was the first sign of consumption, now more commonly known as tuberculosis. (*The angels, not half so happy in heaven/Went envying her and me/Yes! – that was the reason (as all men know, In this kingdom by the sea)/That the wind came out of the cloud by night/Chilling and killing my Annabel Lee.*)



With Virginia suffering from the ailment, the couple moved to New York, hoping Poe could invigorate his literary career and afford the medical attention necessary to nurse her back to health. He rented a room at 130 Greenwich St. in Lower Manhattan, then near the Hudson, and a month later Virginia's mother, Maria Clemm, joined them. Through 1845 and into 1846 the Poes moved four more times, criss-crossing Manhattan from the Upper East Side to the financial district to Turtle Bay on the East river (where the United Nations building now stands) and back to Greenwich village.

During this time, he worked briefly at the *Evening Mirror*, where on January 29, 1845 a poem titled "The Raven" appeared in print and became a popular sensation. Yet, despite its success, "The Raven" was unable to lift the family's fortunes and Poe struggled to support them. With Virginia's tuberculosis intensifying, he desperately sought out a place with clean country air where he hoped his beloved would mend from her ailments. In the spring of that year he found it.

The village of Fordham lay in what is now The Bronx, and travelling through the populous borough today, it is difficult to imagine it as the lush green land it was in Poe's time. There, he rented a modest cottage (built in 1812 and typical of many working-class houses that filled the village) comprised of five rooms – a kitchen, parlour and bedchamber on its main floor, with two tiny rooms occupying its second storey. Surrounded by fields and orchards far from the polluted and crowded city, Poe wrote some of his most famous works, including "The Bells and Eureka." At the time, the home afforded a breathtaking view of the village and lands all the way down from Long Island Sound to Manhattan and beyond. Now it's appropriately located in Poe Park, just west of Fordham University, where much of *The Exorcist* was filmed.

The cottage's front steps lead into the kitchen, where Maria would prepare meals for Poe and Virginia. The impoverished existence led her to pick dandelions from the roadside for soups and salads. Much of Poe's support came from the Jesuits who ran the nearby St. John's College (now Fordham University), offering the use of their library to the writer and supplying the family with food. Further into the cottage is the main living room, where a rocking chair rests near the fireplace and a writing desk is set in a corner. A bust of Poe, that stood outside until it was vandalized, sits in silent watch over the space.

Nestled at the back of the main floor is a tiny room housing the bed Virginia spent much of her time in while at the home. With Poe unable to afford fuel to keep the cottage heated, she stayed downstairs near the fireplace, often keeping her pet cat close to her for warmth. Upstairs are the rooms where Poe slept and worked feverishly to support his family, even as Virginia's life ebbed away below.

Poe was devastated by his wife's increasingly fragile state. The frequent and radical changes in Virginia's health tortured him and drove him back to alcohol. Maria nursed both of them, soliciting publishers to purchase Edgar's work and begging local literary societies for their charity.

Through the spring and summer of 1846, Virginia's condition improved, but with the arrival of autumn's chill, she began to weaken. On January 30, 1847, with Poe and her mother at her bedside, Virginia finally succumbed to tuberculosis. After her death, Poe fell into a deep despair. He took to long solitary walks, frequently venturing into what is now the nearby New York Botanical Garden, which to this day represents the last stretch of the original forest which once covered all of New York City. Virginia was buried nearby,

Photos courtesy of The Edgar Allan Poe Cottage and Asta Sinuess.

and the shadow of her death loomed over the cottage. Mrs. Clemm, by then dependent on her son-in-law, remained at Fordham with him. Poe fell further into depression and in a letter to a friend described his mental state: "I became insane, with long intervals of horrible sanity." It was during this period he penned "Annabel Lee," the famous and sombre elegy for his dear departed wife. (*But our love it was stronger by far than the love/Of those who were older than we/Of many far wiser than we/And neither the angels in Heaven above/Nor the demons down under the sea/Can ever dissever my soul from the soul/Of the beautiful Annabel Lee.*)

In one of life's many fitting ironies, Poe's fortunes improved in 1849. "The Raven" had become a success with its increasing circulation and Poe's renown as a powerful public speaker led to numerous requests for appearances. He left the cottage at Fordham for what would be the last time. On October 3, 1849, the writer was found delirious and dishevelled on the streets of Baltimore, and he died soon after. Virginia's body was disinterred from a nearby cemetery and was buried alongside him. (*For the moon never beams, without bringing me dreams/Of the beautiful Annabel Lee/And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes/Of the beautiful Annabel Lee/And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side/Of my darling – my darling – my life and my bride/In the sepulcher there by the sea/In her tomb by the sounding sea.*)

Soon after Poe's death, Maria Clemm sold the household possessions and lived with a succession of friends until the spring of 1863 when she gained admission to the Episcopal Church Home in Baltimore, where she died in 1871. Countless others occupied the cottage in the years since Poe's death, few knowing the tragic events that occurred within its walls. As Fordham became absorbed by the rapidly growing Bronx, the cottage itself soon faced demolition, but in 1913 was saved by the New York Shakespeare Society, which raised the funds needed to move it across the street to a public park to be preserved in perpetuity. It has been open to the public since then.

Today, the rooms have been restored with furnishings appropriate to Poe's residency, including the aforementioned desk and rocking chair, thought to have belonged to the family.





Traces of Poe: *An interior view of Poe's bedroom, (above) the Poe cottage, and (opposite) period furniture thought to have belonged to the family.*

The cottage is open year-round, with an extensive renovation planned through the next two years to prepare for the 200th anniversary celebration of Poe's birth, in 2009.

The Edgar Allan Poe Cottage is open Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Sundays from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. and weekdays by appointment. Admission is $3 for adults and $2 for children and seniors.
For more info visit bronxhistoricalsociety.org.







DINNER'S READY! THE GORE-MET

In celebration of his 50th column, the Gore-met spills his guts.



The Gore-Met undead: circa 1989

I'm often asked just how I became "The Gore-met," so to mark my 50th column, it's time to pull apart the entrails of my nearly lifelong obsession with the macabre.

For starters, I do not have a formal background in journalism or film; I'm far more qualified than that. My education began sometime in 1970, when everyday after school I would go down the hall to watch *Ultraman* at my friend Pickles' apartment. He had a colour TV and a recent innovation – cable! Soon my house had cable too; *Scooby Doo, Where are You?*, *The Hilarious House of Frightenstein* and *Star Trek* filled my Saturday mornings.

As I got older, my afternoons were dominated by the creature feature and monster mash marathons broadcast out of Buffalo, featuring films such as *The Gorgon*, *The Vulture* and *War of the Gargantuas*; in the evening, *Kolchak: The Night Stalker*. I read voraciously and well above my level, consuming books and comics such as *Ghost Rider*, *Tomb of Dracula* and *Tales of the Zombie*.

At first it was all about monsters, but by the end of the '70s my interest in horror had become more serious. I was able to get into theatres on my own and see *The Amityville Horror*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *The Changeling*. Television warped my thirteen-year-old brain with *Night of the Living Dead*, *Black Christmas*, *Rituals* and *Halloween*, and I was hooked on the work of a rising author named Stephen King. My mother became concerned with all of this to the point that she actually considered a psychiatric evaluation! Little did she know that her own father, a proud Scot who wore a tie while gardening and filled the margins of his King James bible with his own notations, was an avid reader of lurid crime magazines like *True Detective*. The macabre lurks in us all.

There are events in all of our lives that only take on significance in hindsight. For me, it was a blustery fall night in 1981 when I had my first exposure to home video. Consumer video cassette recorders were the latest techno toy but, priced at over $1,000, were not for the weak of pocket, so I jumped at a friend's invitation to a VHS double bill of *I Spit on Your Grave* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. One taste of cinematic viscera and I was hooked. That night, gibbering and soaked in spittle and sweat, The Gore-met was born.

It wasn't long before *my* family had a VCR and memberships with all of the mom 'n' pop video stores sprouting up all over the place. My parents frowned on my now full-blown interest in horror but gave me license to explore a burgeoning addiction to gore by waiving age restrictions on rentals. It was an era of innocence and blood. Armed with the tips I made as a busboy, I tore through any title that promised gruesome death – *Friday the 13th*, *Maniac*, *Dawn of the Dead*, *The Toolbox Murders*, *Nightmare*, *Blood Feast*, *Basket Case* and *Pieces*. A chance rental of *House by the Cemetery* made me an instant Fulci fan and turned me on to spaghetti splatter like *Buried Alive*, *Dr. Butcher M.D.* and *Night of the Zombies*.

I even sussed out the video labels that catered to my newfound obsession: Cult Video, Wizard, Thriller, Paragon, Vestron and Lightning. After everyone had gone to bed, I'd spin these tapes late into the night, bathing in a blood-red cathode glow. Nobody I knew shared my unique passion. This was my secret world, and I revelled in it.

With the arrival of the internet, I got involved in online user groups and started my own (now defunct) website, which was inspired by a Toronto cooking show from the '70s – hence my moniker. The site was devoted to obscure gore films salvaged out of video store bargain bins. *Rue Morgue* creator and then editor-in-chief Rodrigo Gudiño – who I met at a film fest in 1998, along with much of the other Rue Crew – dug my schtick and we soon developed this column, which began in issue fourteen and remains *RM*'s longest running continuous byline.

So, that's the essence of my experience, one lost to time, ground under the inexorable treads of technology, and here I quietly mourn its passing. Of course only fools cling to the past. The end of each experience always leads to a new and greater one. Mine is the byline at the top of this page.





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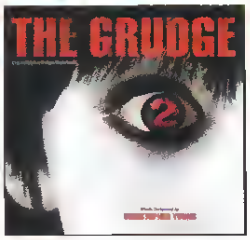
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AUDIO DROME

REVIEWS BY KEITH CARMAN, TOMB DRAGOMIR, MARK R. HASAN, LIISA LADOUCEUR AND AARON VON LUPTON



THE GRUDGE 2 Soundtrack
Christopher Young
VARESE SARABANDE
Having scored the first two *Hellraiser* films, Christopher Young knows how to expand upon prior musical concepts for a sequel without risking overt repetition. While he quotes his chiming *Grudge* theme in the opening track, Young largely focuses on the relationship between instruments in a large, expansive surrounding. A sense of isolation is created through processed reverb, and bass rumbling that almost swallows the intimate performances. Like in the first film, Young also plays with surging textures enhanced with chilling vocals that morph into metallic soundscapes. His taunting *Grudge* theme is alternately coloured by some Japanese woodwind and percussion techniques, and later given a warm, melancholic rendition at the album's end. Young's an expert on timbre, texture and aggressive dynamics, so if you play tracks like "Gishiki" through a subwoofer, you might find deeply disturbed dogs clawing at your door **MRH** ☠☠☠☠



THE DARK Soundtrack
Edmund Butt
MOVIESCORE MEDIA
On this recently released soundtrack, newcomer Edmund Butt eerily captures the isolation faced by a couple when they attempt marital reconciliation on an isolated Scottish island. Surprisingly, he stays away from any ethnic flavour and strictly adheres to dissonant sounds of fear, inner torment and horrifying terror – pulled off with plenty of chilling effects from a good-sized orchestra – and slight electronic sweetening. The largely non-melodic score mimics the murky skies and foggy weather of the isle, and Butt deliberately crafts each cue to surge, crest, and dribble into pools of silence, while processed vocals signal a malevolent child's presence (forming an occasional mood motif). Available from iTunes, the 38-minute score doesn't conclude with a bang or formal thematic statement, but it's an effective little work transcending an otherwise bungled horror film **MRH** ☠☠☠



MASTERS OF HORROR VOL. II Soundtrack
Various artists
DOWNTOWN
Sequels rarely truly match the brilliance and ingenuity of their predecessors, but in this case the second *Masters of Horror* soundtrack does indeed match the lameness of its predecessor. Connected with the series in name only, this volume is, quite simply, fucking pointless. The songs are featured very little, if at all, in the episodes and have equally little to do with horror, other than the odd dark song title. Tracks from Hatebreed, Cradle of Filth, Chimaira and Lacuna Coil are moderately interesting – and readily available – bits of metal and hardcore but are outweighed by throwaway filler from unknowns such as Wounded Cougar and Jump. Other than some nice cover art (surely the greatest reason to buy an album), this reeks of bad selection and being a cash-in **KC** ☠



LONESOME KINGS Psychobilly
Legendary Suffering
KAISER RECORDS
What is it about a psychobilly band screaming lyrics lifted from *Hellraiser* that makes them so instantly cool? That film seems to be somewhat of a theme for Lonesome Kings' follow-up to 2003's *Shotgun Full of Blues* – from the artwork to the album (and track title of the same name), to the recurring themes of lurid temptation and living on the dark side. This is actually a posthumous effort, as the band broke up nearly two years ago, recording just enough tracks for this album before calling it quits. That's too bad, because Lonesome Kings have delivered an absolutely scorching psycho masterpiece full of fist-pumping, bass-pounding rock. Seriously, you would not want to experience the hangover that listening to this album while consuming alcohol would cause.
AVL ☠☠☠☠



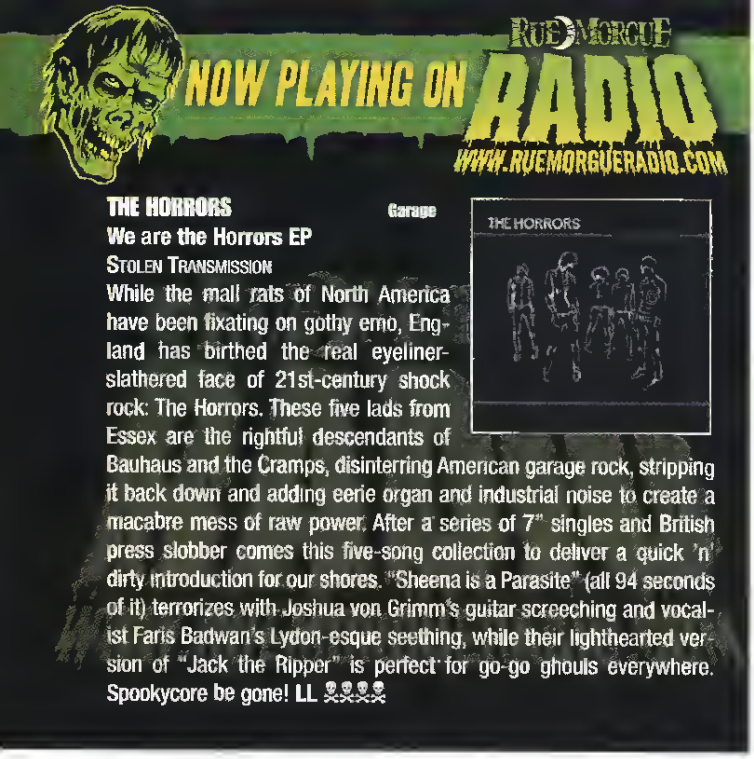
MICHALE GRAVES Punk
Return to Earth
HORROR HIGH
Ever since departing from the reformed Misfits way back when, vocalist Michale Graves has been

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THE MEMPHIS MORTICIANS Psychobilly
Play Primitive Trashman and 13 Other Love Songs
KAISER RECORDS
With song titles like "Undertaker and His Pals," "Devil's Rain," "Corpse Grindin' Baby" and a groovy low-fi sound, *Play Primitive* is an undead B-movie machine.



The Memphis Morticians mix a sweet touch of Southern twang with a speedy but refined level of bass pummelling, adding bargain basement production values to create a nicely fuzzed-out garage vibe. Like the title suggests, this album is as primitive and dumb as you can get, and offers plenty of morbidly obsessed ditties about horror movies, murder and partying – sometimes all three at once. Tailor-made for dirty bars and dirty folks, it just doesn't get any sleazier, bloodier or more fun than this. **AVL** ☠☠☠☠☠



THE HORRORS **Garage**
We are the Horrors EP
STOLEN TRANSMISSION
While the mall rats of North America have been fixating on gothy emo, England has birthed the real eyeliner-slathered face of 21st-century shock rock: The Horrors. These five lads from Essex are the rightful descendants of Bauhaus and the Cramps, disinterring American garage rock, stripping it back down and adding eerie organ and industrial noise to create a macabre mess of raw power. After a series of 7" singles and British press slobber comes this five-song collection to deliver a quick 'n' dirty introduction for our shores. "Sheena is a Parasite" (all 94 seconds of it) terrorizes with Joshua von Grimm's guitar screeching and vocalist Faris Badwan's Lydon-esque seething, while their lighthearted version of "Jack the Ripper" is perfect for go-go ghouls everywhere. Spookycore be gone! **LL** ☠☠☠☠

bopping from one project to the next, failing to turn heads every time. Yet he shows no signs of slowing down, which means somewhere out there someone must still care. In the vein of last year's solo effort, *Punk Rock is Dead*, *Return to Earth* kicks things off with straight-up horror punk anthems "Monster" and "We Wait" before Graves tries experimenting with bad metal ("Creepy Crawly") and worse power ballads ("Fountains of Heroine," "Butchershop"). Many of the album's songs are not horror related, although that doesn't stop him from featuring the old Misfits skull paint prominently on the CD. Though he deserves credit for daring to differ from the countless horror punk clones out there, *Return to Earth* perfectly exemplifies why he'll only ever be remembered for his former band **AVL** ☠



THE HORRIFICS **Punk**
Now Fear This
1031 RECORDS
Boasting classic punk riffs at a breakneck pace, The Horrifics look cool, play fast and clearly dig horror. Deep-fried Texas hardcore with a metallic tint, it's a familiar sound, (you may remember lead screamer Boo Gruesome from under-appreciated horror punkers EERIE Ln.). But *Now Fear This* has energy to burn with slap-along rhythms, Gruesome's burly vox and tunes about killer spirals ("Uzumaki"), nasty saucer men ("Target Earth") and "Dead Kids" (in black! Woah-oh!). It's an auspicious debut worth both your bloody eardrums. Hear the fear at hornfics.net **TD** ☠☠☠☠



NIGHTMARE AT HANGING ROCK **Punk**
Serial Killers
TIME TRAVEL RECORDS
Nightmare at Hanging Rock – two DIY dudes from Ohio – present a disc of dirty little ditties about the world's most infamous real-life cannibals, psychopaths and necros. Gacy, BTK, Manson, Bundy, Jack the Ripper, etc. get skewered in two minutes or less on *Serial Killers*, a weird idea with simple production, diverse musicianship and just enough quirky humour to push past the gimmick. Lewd, crude and above all else informative (did you know Jeffrey Dahmer used to masturbate over a stolen mannequin?), *Serial Killers* comes highly recommended by that little man inside your head. **TD** ☠☠☠1/2



UNDER A NIGHTMARE **Punk**
Return of the Rot
CRYPT OF BLOOD RECORDS
Slapdash Pittsburgh punk mingling bits of Black Flag and old AFI with more-punk-than-metal guitars reflected from the bottom of a rusted tin can, *Return of the Rot* features a cheesy-looking corpse on the cover and a bunch of rock/metal songs you'll immediately forget. A fairly groovy tune about a serial killer aside (either called "The Vine Tooth" or "The Live Youth," we still can't make out the scribbly track listing), *Return of the Rot* probably should have just stayed where it was. **TD DOA**



THE GOTHIC ARCHIES **Pop**
The Tragic Treasury: Songs from a Series of Unfortunate Events
NONESUCH/WARNER
Avid Lemony Snicket readers may recognize this side project by brooding indie boy Stephin Merritt of Magnetic Fields. Since 2001, Merritt has written theme songs for each Snicket audio book; this full-length disc collects them all, plus two new tracks. Like the books, this disc is primarily for twisted tweens, featuring creepy and quirky pop songs with simple rhymes and silly titles such as "Smile! No One Cares How You Feel" and "Scream and Run Away," a sea shanty about evil Count Olaf. Merritt's acoustic guitar and piano numbers (with occasional guest accordion from Lemony Snicket, a.k.a. Daniel Handler) skirt the edges of modern cabaret, which could appeal to grown-ups, too. (His cheesy gothic synthpop tune "The World is a Very Scary Place" misses the mark though.) With Gorey-esque illustrations in the booklet, *The Tragic Treasury* is a fortunate event for seekers of childish fantastical frights.
LL ☠☠☠



THE DEMON SEEDS **Garage**
Have a Date with Death
NECRO-TONE RECORDS
A modern, ghoulish take on '60s psychedelic garage, The Demon Seeds crank out some pretty hip shit for guys in button-up letterman sweaters. The gory, groovy garage rock mixed with smooth surf breakdowns on *Have a Date with Death* kick off with classic Standells-style keyboard on "Adam and Evil." From there, *Have a Date with Death* showcases a fair smattering of party rock rivalling the Transylvania Twist, complete with scattered nods to Jack the Ripper and H.G. Lewis. If we're bringing in a new class of psychedelic horror rock, let me be the first to nominate The Demon Seeds as the Valedictorians of Rocking Out! **TD** ☠☠☠1/2





An outlet for the imaginations of a couple movie-mad fiends, CREATURE FEATURE is an electro-sideshow of monstrous proportions. Welcome to what they call...

THE GREATEST SHOW UNEARTHED

by DAVE ALEXANDER

In the wormy world of horror-themed music, writing songs about monster movies is as common as corpse rot, which is why California's Creature Feature decided to go several steps further. Shortly after meeting at a Halloween party in 2005, Curtis Rx (vocals, guitar) and Erik X (synth, samplers) started down a maniacal path to a style that embraces horror wholeheartedly yet doesn't sound anything like horror punk, refuses to rely on the shocking imagery of gorecore and goes beyond grim soundtrack atmospherics, yet uses elements of all these styles to tell stories.

"From the very beginning, when we said that we were horror music, we really meant it," explains Curtis. "We made a specific goal that everything we write would sound like a mini audio horror film and give the illusion that it was actually from a horror film you haven't seen yet. We aren't against horror punk or horror metal at all, we just want to start a whole new genre of horror music, Halloween horror music. The kind of Halloween music, that if you pick up a pumpkin and hold it to your ear, you can hear Creature Feature."

The name comes from a monster-themed board game Curtis had as a child (one similar to *Monopoly* but instead of competing for property, players purchase classic monsters) and represents the "ultimate merger of creatures and film." A mere four days after meeting, Curtis and Erik wrote their first song together: "Aim for the Head" – a post-apocalyptic survivors vs. zombies tale. They're not exclusively about traditional monsters, though. Other tracks on their debut full-length independent album, *The Greatest Show Unearthed*, include the nature-fights-back themed "The Meek Shall Inherit the Earth"; "Look to the Skies," a riff on *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*; "Bound and Gagged," which explores in nasty detail the real-life terror of a kidnapping gone wrong; and "Six Foot Deep," a Gothic-flavoured Victorian story of a castle-bound wretch haunted by a dead lover.

"We write about the subjects we care about: flesh-eating ghouls, dancing skeletons, man-eating insects, dark carnivals, haunted cemeteries, Halloween and Dia de los Muertos," explains Curtis. "We write about horrific subjects and themes, plus the stuff that used to make the hair on the back of our necks stand up as children. For instance, we have a song about the works of Edgar Allan Poe, made up almost entirely of the titles of his writings, a carnival-themed song inspired by the works of Ray Bradbury, a song inspired by Edward Gorey's *The Ghastlycrumb Tinies*, but then we also have an entirely unique song about the deeply tragic and ill-fated life of a disturbed child, from birth to death, and more. So, it's kind of a mixed candy bag o' tainted treats."

It's all packaged in a dense mix of sound effects, movie clips and electronic beats that take cues from classic arcade games, TV theme songs, cartoon music, as well as composers such as Danny Elfman, Joseph LoDuca (*The Evil Dead* trilogy), plus keyboard-heavy horror bands, notably Goblin.

"We have so many things going on in our songs, and at any given time we could have up to 30-plus tracks playing. There are multiple keys, layered guitar sections, interweaving bass lines, vintage samples, strange sound effects, unique drum setups, spoken word, but all coming out from a coffin with sound-holes," says Curtis.

It's a delirious mix of postmodern mayhem, but it works, proving that two fiends with grandiose ideas and some electronic equipment can out-horror a full band with black makeup, limited chords and unlimited "whoahs."

Given the cinematic feel of Creature Feature's music, it's no shocker then that Curtis and Erik have ambitions far beyond putting out albums. Currently they're scoring some short films (their MySpace page, myspace.com/creaturefeature-music, invites filmmakers to contact them about using the band's music on soundtracks), are in talks to score some low-budget features, and plan on making a video for each of the eleven songs on their album for a DVD release. Curtis, who has a screenwriting background, says that ultimately, though, Creature Feature wants to make its own (Fulci-inspired) feature: "We want to see monsters, blood and to bring back the era of the cult classic."

Photo by Robyn Swank.

PLAY DEAD

GRAPHICS PLAYABILITY SHIVERS

HIGHEST RATING IS THREE.

GAMES REVIEWED BY ANDREW LEE



VAMPIRE: DARK INFLUENCES

Card Game

White Wolf Game Studios

The Prince of the Vampires has decided he's gonna sleep for a couple hundred years and needs a worthy successor to rule the night while he takes his dirt nap. *Dark Influences* is the chance you've been waiting for to prove to all of those namby-pamby Nosferatu that you've got the fangs to fill the position.

Interestingly, the game is all about politics; players must try to win favours, make allegiances, break promises and stab everyone else in the back as they ascend the vampire clans in a bid to reign supreme. Each player begins the game as a vampire with his or her own unique powers; for example, the conniving Ventrue has the ability to dominate others with her mind, while the ferocious Gangrel sports vicious claws to give her an edge during combat.

Dark Influences progresses quickly through phases where players roll the dice and collect blood tokens while using event cards to modify game play. These cards can be used to cast spells which can boost your strength, enhance combat skills or force other players to be staked or subjected to sunlight.

Two to five players do battle in exciting, fast-paced games that usually last about 30 minutes. After six turns, the number of Kindred each vampire has won over is counted up and a winner is declared. If you've got half an hour to kill and want to be declared Prince of the Vampires – and honestly, who doesn't? – this ought to do it.





DEAD MONEY

Card Game

Cheapass Games

Congratulations, you are a zombie! Not only do you get to shuffle around malls, moaning, groaning and munching on brains, you also have a part-time job working at Freddy's, "the watering hole of the damned." Basing it on a popular card game from 1996 called *Give Me the Brain!*, designer James Ernest has revamped it and set it in the Old West when men were men and cattle were nervous.

With hilarious illustrations by artist Brian Snoddy, cards resemble regular playing cards, but with some key differences: they're decorated with coins, hands, brains and detailed instructions that must be followed according to an easy-to-read rule book. Three to five players take turns passing the grey matter and playing fun poker hands in games that usually last about 45 minutes. The goal? Lose your cards and money as quickly as possible so you can go back to your brain brunch.



ARKHAM HORROR: CURSE OF THE DARK PHARAOH

Board Game Expansion Pack

Fantasy Flight Games

Hot on the black heels of the *Arkham Horror* board game (*RM#54*), *Curse of the Dark Pharaoh* is the first expansion pack aimed at rekindling your most Cthulhu-crammed nightmares.

Meant to be played with the original game, *Pharaoh* is packed to the slimy gills with 45 new locations to explore (including The Curiositie Shoppe and Velma's Diner – try the calamari!) and plenty of new cards brimming with monsters, insects and shambling mummies.

If that wasn't enough, there are also 76 beautifully rendered investigator cards, including the Book of Anubis and the Chime of Ra (helpful during combat), 21 new spells, allies and a whole slew of original cards designed to keep your fictional Arkham neighbourhoods safe from various Lovecraftian critters. It's a welcome addition to an already great game.

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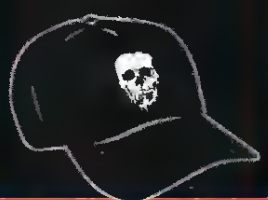


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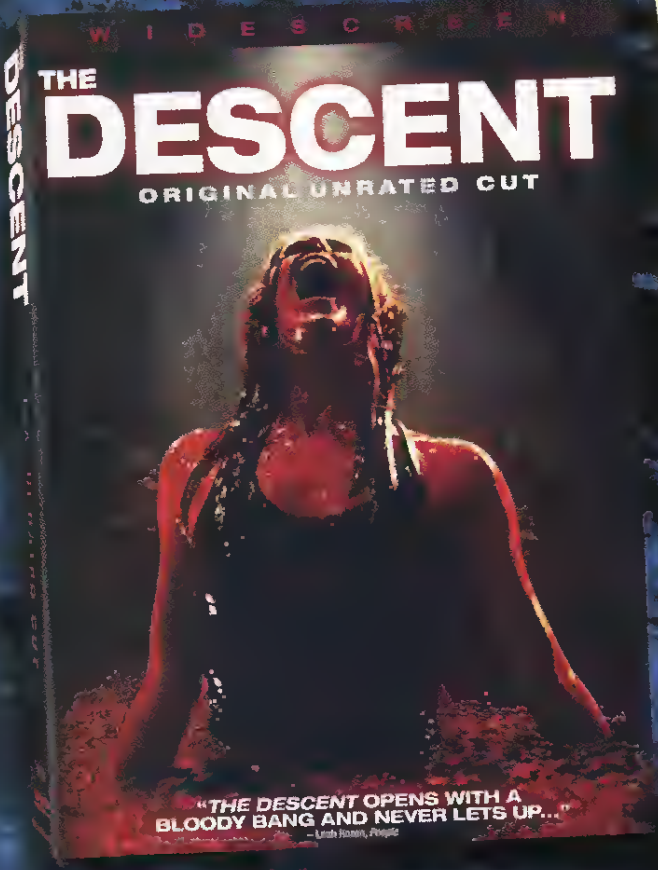
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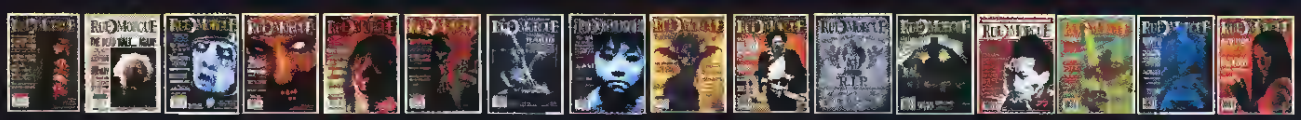
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Classic Cut Presents

THE GHOST STORY OF YOTSUYA



TSURUYA NAMBOKU
Japan – mid-19th Century

If J-horror is indeed in its final throes, as some proclaim, then it's reassuring to know that there is a lot more where that came from. Japan has a centuries-old tradition of ghost stories and macabre stories of the supernatural, karmic tales of terror chronicled in books, plays, woodblock prints, paintings and – the most tried-and-true method – told among travellers over roadside campfires. Japan's oldest book, the *Kojiki* (712 AD), is dedicated to myths and monsters of all kind, from boneless leech babies and fetid female zombies to gods born from vomit.

Kabuki theatre is one of the country's richest sources of horror. Now considered one of Japan's high art forms, kabuki began as a lowly form of entertainment, catering to the commoners and merchants and despised by the ruling samurai class. Subsequently, its plays are full of flaring passions, betrayal and violence, not to mention maiming, mayhem and murder.

Towering ominously among this treasure trove of terror, *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* is the quintessential Japanese horror tale. Penned in the mid-19th century by Tsuruya Namboku, it tells of Iemon, a samurai fallen on hard times who makes a meagre living with his wife Oiwa. Proud Iemon longs to recapture his faded glory and finds it in O-ume, the pretty daughter of a rich merchant. Unsure how to approach the delicate situation, he is aided by Naosuke, an escaped convict who poses as a gardener. Naosuke becomes Iemon's imp of the perverse, egging him on to murder his wife, even attempting to speed up the process by reintroducing Oiwa to an old flame.

No matter how alluring the merchant's daughter, though, Iemon can't bring himself to do the dirty deed, regardless of suspicions of his wife's adultery. When Oiwa falls ill due to the strains of the situation, Naosuke, who takes wicked pleasure in driving the couple apart, has a poison delivered to her in the guise of pain-relieving medication. The toxin horribly disfigures Oiwa's face, causing festering boils to erupt on her skin. Iemon finds her crawling about the room in spasms, a grotesque caricature of her former self. Believing her to be a demon, he runs his sword through her. Nasty old Naosuke tells him the former suitor poisoned Oiwa because she rebuffed him, and the two men take revenge. Both bodies are disposed of in the local pond, but Iemon, wracked with guilt, starts to see apparitions of his disfigured wife. She appears before him at the most inopportune moments, including on his wedding night. Striking out at the phantom, Iemon hits his new bride O-ume instead. The hallucinations persist and the swordsman returns to the scene of the crime, where he meets his comeuppance at the hands of his two victims, who have risen from their watery grave.

It may seem outmoded in these post-*Ringu* times, but make no mistake: *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya*'s shadow looms large over Japanese horror. That grotesque drooping eye peering out through stringy black hair? Have a look at Oiwa's spectre, if you dare, and see where Nakata found his inspiration. Those passive ghosts of Kiyoshi Kurosawa's *Pulse*, who drive their victims to their doom by simple, unrelenting insistence? Watch Oiwa and her old flame emerge from the shadows wherever Iemon looks, carrying out their vengeance without lifting so much as a bony finger.

The story itself has been equally insistent in the way it has haunted Japanese cinema, appearing at least once every decade. Shozo Makino, Japan's "first film director," shot a silent version in 1921, followed by period film pioneer Daisuke Ito and such illustrious names as Shiro Toyoda (of *Portrait of Hell* fame), Kazuo Mori (of the borderline horror *Sleepy Eyes of Death* saga) and Kenji Misumi (*Lone Wolf and Cub*). The most recent entry was by *Battle Royale*'s Kinji Fukasaku in 1994, though, the most off-kilter version comes courtesy of humanist women's issues filmmaker Keisuke Kinoshita, whose 1949 two-parter removed all the supernatural elements and focused on remorse and suffering, delivering a ghost story without a ghost.

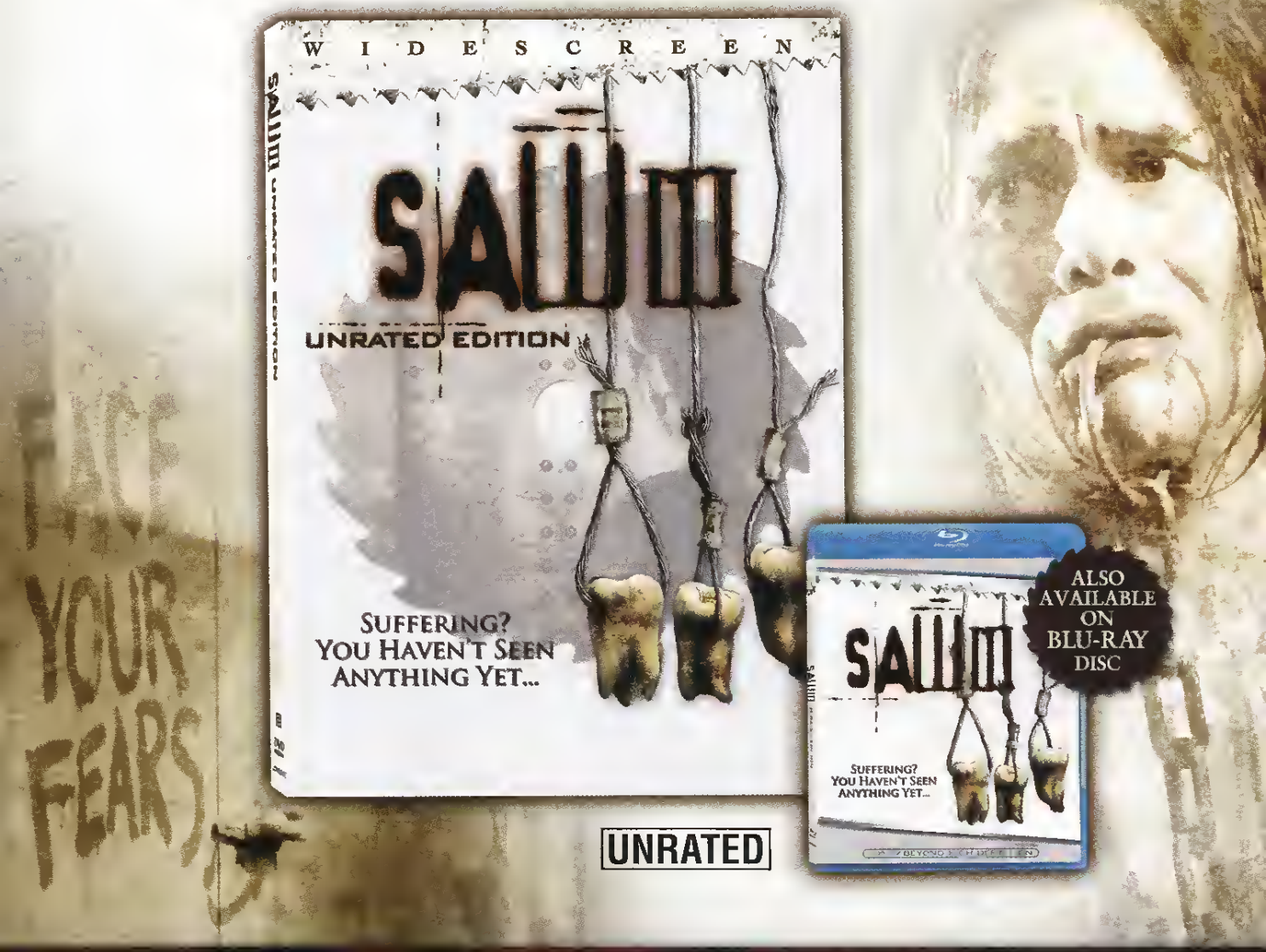
Although these have their merits, none can beat what is generally considered the best of them all: the 1959 adaptation by Nobuo Nakagawa, the grandmaster of Japanese horror. Those who have seen Criterion's recent release of his masterpiece *Jigoku* (*RM#52*) will have some inkling of what to expect: outrageous stylization, lurid splashes of colour, bold lighting patterns, revolving trap door sets and the meanest facial scars this side of Freddy Krueger. Quite simply, when it comes to J-horror, *Yotsuya* is the original heavy hitter.

Tom Mes



Nobuo Nakagawa's 1959 adaptation of ***The Ghost Story of Yotsuya.***

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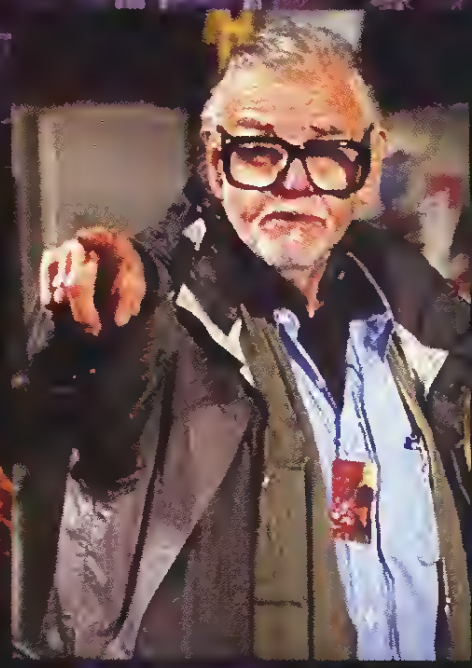
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